

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE
SCHOOL-BASED CONSULTATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigated the implementation of a system of consultation as the method of service delivery for a central Special Educational Needs (SEN) support service in a local authority.

Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and SEN Advisory Teachers who participated in consultation were interviewed individually in order to understand their perceptions of the consultation process they engaged in. SEN Advisory Teachers were found to have received specific training relating to the philosophy and implementation of consultation whereas the SENCOs had been excluded from any formal training.

SENCOs and SEN Advisory Teachers working together via consultation in two mainstream primary schools were observed engaging in consultation. SENCOs were found to value the technical skills of the Advisory Teachers and there was evidence of SENCOs transferring the skills and knowledge learned through consultation to different situations. There was also evidence of an imbalance of power in the relationship between the two professional groups and of dominant behaviours.

The research identified a number of characteristics of an effective system of consultation, together with a number of characteristics of an ineffective system of consultation. Some recommendations have been made regarding the implications of the results with regard to schools and support services.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It has historically been the situation that central Special Educational Needs (SEN) support services operate on a referral basis. Schools identify a concern relating to a specific pupil and make a referral, still often paper-based, to the relevant service which then accepts or rejects the referral based on a pre-determined set of criteria. The intention of this research project is to gain an insight into an alternative method of engagement between SEN support services and schools, namely Consultation, and to identify the characteristics of an effective system of consultation. Initially, the purpose of the research was to investigate whether more effective SEN support is delivered through the process of consultation than through the referral system but, as will be seen later, the focus of the research was reviewed and refined as the research progressed, culminating in the final research question which is articulated in 2.23 (p52).

The background to this research is as follows. The SEN Code of Practice defines special educational needs (2001: 1:3: p6). It also describes three stages of a graduated response to meeting the special educational needs of those children and young people who have been identified as requiring intervention over and above the normal differentiated curriculum, namely School Action, School Action Plus and Statement. In addition, it states that, as part of this graduated response, schools should involve an outside agency to provide them with additional advice and support for those pupils placed at School Action Plus and Statement. It

therefore follows that the role of central SEN support services – an outside agency as described by the Code - is to provide an added layer of specialist SEN support to schools so that the needs of children and young people with SEN are identified early and that appropriate support is provided in order that they are included in school life and make progress.

The issue that this research is addressing is as follows. Over the course of the past ten years or so budget restrictions and funding cuts in local authorities have had an impact on the size and scope of many central SEN support services. As part of their response to these changes many of these central SEN support services have changed their method of service delivery with schools from a referral system to a consultation system in order to maximise their reduced capacity and to support capacity building in schools. The trend since the 1990's has been for teachers in SEN support services to be moving towards a system of providing support directly to class teachers to enable them to respond effectively to the diversity of learners in their classrooms rather than to be providing a 'hands-on' level of external support through direct teaching to pupils (Blamires and Moore, 2004). Much comparative research has been undertaken to look at the role of support services and the role of consultation in an inclusive education system (Conoley and Conoley, 1982; Davies and Davies, 1989) but little work has been undertaken to examine the quality of the support being delivered through consultation to identify what makes this method of service delivery effective. Without sufficient information on the characteristics of an effective system of consultation there is a risk that limited central resources are being utilised inefficiently. This in turn would mean that schools are not receiving value for

money from the central support services and, consequently, the needs of children and young people with special educational needs are not being supported adequately.

The research is intending to identify a response to the issue as follows. A case study that concentrates on the experiences of participants, SENCOs and SEN Advisory Teachers, in the process of consultation as practised in a particular local authority promises to add to existing knowledge about consultation as a method of service delivery by a central support service. It will also offer an insight into the characteristics of an effective system of consultation, as identified by those professionals who participate in this particular method of service delivery.

In the 1970's and 1980's there seemed to be a growing awareness of issues relating to the effectiveness of SEN support services. Publications such as "School Consultation: a guide to practice and theory" (Conoley and Conoley, 1982) played a key part in raising awareness of an alternative way of delivering support to schools, but in the intervening period little seems to have been added to the debate. Consultation has been described as:

"..a voluntary, non-supervisory relationship between professionals from different fields established to aid in his/her professional functioning" (Caplan, 1970, cited in Kelly, Woolfson and Boyle, 2008:140). The research will explore exactly how voluntary this relationship is in reality and the effect this has on the outcomes of the consultation process.

Consultation is not, according to Conoley, Apter and Conoley (1981) cited in Kelly, Woolfson and Boyle:

“.. the more knowledgeable consultant giving answers to a puzzled consultee.

Rather, it must be viewed as a collaborative problem solving process during which the consultant facilitates the creative, coping skills of the consultee about the unique aspects of the problem and the consultee’s situation” (2008:141).

The Audit Commission, in “ListenUp! : effective community consultation” defined consultation as a:

“.. process of dialogue that leads to a decision” (1999:56). The term ‘dialogue’ refers to a continual exchange of views and information, and suggests a two-way process of sharing knowledge and opinions and working together that is as applicable to school-based consultation as it is to community consultation.

For the purposes of this research a teacher-driven definition of consultation was employed. A number of school-based teachers who have participated in consultation in the role of consultee were interviewed during the course of the research and were asked to give their own personal definition of consultation. Analysis of their definitions showed certain common themes but with subtle differences which may have an effect on their engagement in the process and, consequently, on the effectiveness of the consultation. Their responses are listed in detail in Chapter 3. When starting this research I was firmly of the opinion that the effective engagement of school-based teachers in the consultation process is crucial if the process is to have any lasting impact, hence the importance of the teacher-driven definitions of consultation. Reflecting upon the various academic and dictionary definitions of consultation, together with the definitions offered by teachers I have, for the purposes of this research, exercised my discretion in favour of the definition given by Teacher 6, namely:

“Consultation is very solution-focused. It involves the SENCO or class teacher working with the Advisory Teacher ... to identify strategies or interventions that will help a pupil make progress in an identified area such as phonics”. This definition links most closely with Schein’s (1969) notion of the ‘helping relationship’ that involves working with and not for the client, in this research the client being the SENCO or class teacher, and this is the definition that will be employed throughout this research.

Consultation began to be explored and developed in UK support services as a solution to the problem of an increase in individual assessment work with more children and young people being labelled as having ‘special needs’. More children and young people being identified as having special educational needs required more resources, which in turn meant increasing costs, all at a time when education budgets, particularly for centrally retained services, were under severe pressure. It could also be argued that the existing referral system achieved few significant positive outcomes which led to frustration and dissatisfaction by both support staff and schools. There was also less problem-solving in the system which could not lend itself to capacity building.

If the task of SEN support services is to build capacity, as stated in reports by, among others, The Audit Commission (2002), and thus to extend intellectual and social capital then there has to be an exploration of what models of management and change should be used. A Problem-Solving Model (Deno, 1985) of identifying problems, analysing causes and solutions and then developing action plans is a very popular and effective model but leaves participants in danger of burn-out if it

is the only model in use, as identified by Tim Brighouse, (CEO Birmingham) at the Institute of Education Guardian Debate with Chris Woodhead (HMCI) in 1998. The Ensuring Compliance Model, (Lee and Fitz, 1998; Watkins 2006) much favoured by the government in recent times, decides what is right and propagates single solutions. This is not universally agreed as an effective climate for staff to work in with children. Appreciative Enquiry (Hammond, 1996), on the other hand, appreciates the best of what is already happening and envisions what might be, based on what is working well, and creates the vision of what will be. The implication of this is that it is more effective to work from existing solutions and increase the solutions rather than the problems. This is supportive of schools and their development and aligns itself to the process of effective consultation. This in turn will produce wider efficiency and thus support school improvement.

The criticisms of schools raised by staff in support services, (Wagner, 2004) often include the following:

- being expected to assess pupils with little relevance to the context of the classroom
- not being able to see class teachers
- only being asked to see individual pupils
- not being welcome in classrooms
- only becoming involved when situations are at a critical stage

Interestingly, the criticisms of support service staff raised by schools (Wagner, 2004) often include the following:

- using assessments which are of little relevance to classroom practice
- not working with teachers closely enough

- only seeing individual children
- not coming into the classroom
- not seeing school staff until there is a crisis situation

The above are views that are similar to those I have heard expressed, over a number of years, from both school-based staff and staff in central SEN support services when discussing the quality and effectiveness of the working relationship. If schools and support services are to work together effectively then it follows that the model of engagement used should seek to satisfy the professional needs of both groups with a constant focus on pupil progress and inclusion in school.

This research project developed from the premise that support services continue to work with schools to support the progress and inclusion of pupils with SEN in an on-going climate of financial constraints where the notions of accountability and value for money are more important than ever, and yet there appears to have been little research into the most effective way of delivering these services. Is the process of consultation the most effective way of delivering support to schools or is a referral system more suited to deliver support in a results-driven education system? My research of the consultation process has involved me researching a situation 'as is'. It has not involved the setting up of a system but rather the research of a system of consultation that is currently in operation.

1.1 My Focus: Teachers in SEN Support Services – which group is involved in the research?

From personal experience and observation it would seem that both the constitution and delivery methods of SEN Support Services are almost as many and varied as

there are support services. Support Services operate in different ways in different local authorities and therefore the role and purpose of teachers in support services differs significantly. In some support services teachers deliver direct teaching support to pupils whereas in others they work indirectly with pupils through delivery methods such as consultation. In yet other services, teachers may operate a system of both direct and indirect support. In the authority where I am employed there is a clear system of Advisory Teachers who engage with schools through process consultation and whose role is to build capacity in schools so that schools are better able to meet the diverse and complex needs of their most vulnerable pupils.

How teachers are employed in support services also varies significantly across the various services and appears to have some links to the designated role of the teachers in question. In some authorities they are employed under Teachers Pay and Conditions and in others they are employed under Soulbury Terms and Conditions. Yet again, in others, certain teachers in the support service are employed under Teachers Pay and Conditions whilst others in the same service are employed under Soulbury Terms and Conditions. More recently, there have been some proposals to move centrally retained teachers from Soulbury to JNC conditions of service, although this has yet to gain currency. The more general 'rule of thumb' seems to be that those teachers who deliver direct teaching support to pupils are employed under Teachers Pay and Conditions whilst those whose role is of an advisory nature are employed under Soulbury Terms and Conditions.

The first main category of teachers in support services are those who deliver direct

teaching support to pupils. These teachers tend to be either sensory teachers, that is Qualified Teachers of the Deaf or Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired, or teachers who are delivering direct teaching support to pupils who are in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs, often pupils with a Specific Learning Difficulty such as dyslexia. It is these groups of teachers who tend to be employed under Teachers Pay and Conditions and who can perhaps be viewed as teachers working in the more traditional role of Support Service Teacher as the key focus of their role is individual pupil support rather than capacity building. This group of support teachers will not be the focus of this research.

The other main category of teachers in support services are those whose main role and purpose is to build capacity within schools and who therefore do not deliver direct teaching support to individual pupils. Their role is to work with the Head Teacher, Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and school staff in order to increase their skills, confidence and competence to both fully include pupils with SEN and to provide a level of support that is appropriately matched to pupils' needs and ensures their progression. These are the support service teachers whose method of service delivery is often delivered through consultation. They may engage and interact with pupils as part of the consultation process, and may even undertake some level of direct assessment work with individual pupils as part of this process, but they do not deliver direct teaching support. These teachers are more likely, although not always, to be employed under Soulbury Terms and Conditions as this is deemed to more accurately reflect their role. These are the group of SEN support service teachers whose method of service delivery, i.e. consultation, will be the focus of this research. For the purposes of

this research this second category of teachers will be referred to as Advisory Teachers and will represent the support service teachers who engage with schools through the process of consultation. This is the group of support service teachers who will be the focus of the research.

For clarification of their role, their job description would define their role and purpose as mainstreaming SEN through services to schools in line with the wider Children's Services agenda and locality working. This means that a specific function of their role is to work with schools to ensure that SEN is a mainstream issue across the school and that all teachers in schools recognise that they are, as described in the SEN Code of Practice (2001), 'teachers of SEN'. The role of Advisory Teachers means that they work in close liaison with colleagues in School Improvement such as Children's Services Improvement Advisers and, prior to The White Paper, School Improvement Partners, in order to bring together the improvement and inclusion agendas. They will be required to provide consultation, challenge and support to schools in relation to the principles of partnership, inclusion and multi-agency working.

They will also be required to provide advice, guidance and training to schools and other agency partners, parents and carers in relation to the SEN Code of Practice (2001) and all aspects of SEN and inclusive provision including implementation of national and legislative requirements. They will be required to focus on outcomes for children and young people and on high quality delivery of service to support whole school and class developments to successfully include all children and

young people. Promotion of inclusion and inclusive practices would appear to underpin all their activities.

For the purposes of this project interviews with SENCOs in mainstream primary and secondary schools will be carried out to explore their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the consultation method of support service delivery. A definition of consultation in relation to support service delivery is employed. In addition to the interviews, case studies will be undertaken in two schools using comparative methodology. One school being selected for being a school where consultation was felt to be effective by both the school and the visiting staff, and the second school being selected because it was a school described by visiting staff as 'resistant' to the process of consultation. The research will attempt to comment on whether the consultation method of service delivery that blossomed in the 1990s has, in fact, led to any significant improvement to the progress of pupils with SEN and has supported capacity building in schools (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989; Blamires and Moore, 2004).

1.2 My position in the research

It is important in this introduction to clarify my own position in relation to the research. My professional role is that of a manager in a central support service and someone who has had significant experience of working in both a referral system and a consultation system. As a professional I naturally have a view in terms of professional practice and my view, based on personal experience, is that consultation is a more effective way of working with and delivering support to schools than a referral system. However, this is a view based on practical

experience and instinct, not one based on evidence, hence my interest in this research.

In my own professional situation consultation was introduced as the method of service delivery with schools because it supports capacity building in schools and aims to bring about change by collaborative means. I was instrumental in its introduction. In operational terms it means that the person offering consultation, the Advisory Teacher or Educational Psychologist, works alongside others offering perspectives and expertise rather than acting as the lone expert. In the support service where I work consultation is described and viewed as fundamentally a collaborative process in which concerns are addressed through a joint, recursive process of exploration, intervention and review. Action at all levels, whether consultation, direct observation, assessment, intervention or training, is possible providing that the action is embedded in a shared, consistent problem solving framework agreed across all participants. The aim, therefore, as described by Watkins and Wagner (1995), is that joint problem solving through effective collaboration is the key to consultation at every level of action. Watkins and Wagner (1995) assert that consultation aims to build 'circles of support' based on sharing expertise and responsibility rather than passing concerns up a hierarchical structure. The process of consultation in operation could perhaps be summed up as one of 'drawing in' rather than one of 'passing on'. This means that in my service consultation is seen as a framework which more closely matches the complexity of the way in which school and professional systems interact, aiming to impact at a variety of levels across the individual child, the group/class or the school.

When consultation was introduced into the context in which I work its collaborative nature was felt to fundamentally reflect the aspirations of the 'Every Child Matters' (2004) framework by explicitly promoting 'joined up' actions across professional staff, children, young people and their parents/carers. It is also important to note the context at the time, which was that of a local authority where education services had been deemed as inadequate by Ofsted inspection and where rapid improvement was required. Consultation as a method of service delivery was also expected to promote closer working relationships with schools and to build their capacity to address many of their difficulties 'in-house', thus accelerating the overall educational progress that was needed.

The involvement of Advisory Teachers is negotiated, agreed and progressed through termly meetings called Inclusion Partnership Meetings, the minutes of which record key decisions and actions. These meetings are the drivers for Advisory Teacher (and Educational Psychologist) involvement which then follows a recursive and reciprocal process rather than one which is linear and serial. The meetings allow for discussions to identify whole school issues and global training needs, thus supporting the principle of capacity building. Individual pupil consultations, the focus of this research, are agreed with reference to a graduated response, as set out in the SEN Code of Practice (2001) and available capacity. Parental permission is always obtained by school staff, usually the SENCO, prior to the start of any consultation.

1.3 The research question

As has been stated, the original intention of this research project was to gain an insight into the advantages and disadvantages of an alternative method of engagement between SEN support services and schools, namely Consultation, and to evaluate whether it is a more effective way of delivering specialist SEN support than the traditional referral method. Therefore, at this initial stage, the research question to be answered is:

“Is consultation an effective method for SEN support service delivery?”

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Special Education

The notion of Special Educational Needs is no longer limited to the relatively few children who are removed from mainstream education and educated in a special school (Winzer and Mazurek, 2002). It is now the concern of every teacher. As 'The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice' (2001) states more than once, 'all teachers are teacher of SEN'. Special education is now viewed as an integrative professional area that cuts across a spectrum of services. It makes use of many differing fields of knowledge and depends upon the techniques, the concepts and the practices of several allied disciplines. External forces involved include legislation, politics, medicine, ethics and economics, to mention just a few. As Winzer and Mazurek (2002) inform us, the focus for support services is now on outcomes, quantifiable data, teacher accountability and responsibility. A broader knowledge and skill base is therefore needed. Caplan (1970, cited in Kelly, Woolfson and Boyle, 2008: 140) defined consultation as:

"a voluntary, non-supervisory relationship between professionals from different fields established to aid in his/her professional functioning". It would seem that a very broad knowledge and skill base would indeed be required in order to participate effectively in such a relationship.

2.2 The Warnock Report

In 1974, The Warnock Committee, chaired by Mary Warnock, was established to look at special education. Their brief was wide and their report, “Special Educational Needs. Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People”, was published in 1978. The Warnock Report, as it has come to be known, has had a considerable effect upon the whole of education. The report stated that approximately 20% of school age children would have special educational needs at some point during their school years and, as a consequence, may require additional resources. Special needs could arise from sensory impairment, physical disability, learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural problems or any combination. Lacey and Lomas (1993) state that support services exist to provide specialist support for this 20% whether in special schools or in mainstream education. My research involves the work of Advisory Teachers and SENCOs in supporting the progress of this mainstream 20% as described by Lacey and Lomas (1993).

2.3 Background to the role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

The position of SENCO was made statutory by the 1993 Education Act and The SEN Code of Practice set out its purpose (DfEE, 1994). Early research appeared to focus on the administrative and managerial demands of the SENCO role and its different purposes to a range of stakeholders (Bines and Loxley, 1995; Farrell, 1998; Wedell, 2004). The Green Paper provided a positional change for special educational needs and advocated that the SENCO role should incorporate an element of leadership (DfEE, 1997). However, the notion of the SENCO role as a

leadership one that could influence standards was first introduced by the National Standards for Special Educational Needs Co-ordination (TTA, 1998) and was then reinforced in the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001).

SENCOs were now encouraged to influence whole-school practices concerning teaching and learning (Crowther, Dyson and Millward, 2001). SENCOs were thus encouraged to take a greater leadership role, although the literature did not explicitly explore the concept of leadership. The Green Paper also set the tone for future legislation concerning access and equality of opportunity for pupils with special educational needs (DfES, 2001b). Three key policies further raised the leadership expectation of SENCOs. 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2004) had far-reaching implications and 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (DfES, 2004), the Government's strategy for special educational needs, set high aspirations for pupils' learning, achievement and participation. The 'Children's Plan' (DCSF, 2007), raised expectations of pupil outcomes emphasising, perhaps for the first time, that the achievement of children with special educational needs should be brought in line with that of their peers. It could be argued that each piece of legislation gradually added to the tension surrounding SENCO leadership, as they advocated that outcomes for pupils should be secured through effective universal practice. Consultation, as opposed to referral, was therefore introduced against this background of a developing and evolving SENCO role.

As these wide-ranging policies took hold, there was a call for SENCOs to take up formal leadership positions (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005). A significant step towards developing their leadership capacity was taken with the requirement that new

SENCOs obtain the qualification 'National Award for SEN Co-ordination' (DCSF, 2009). Leadership and management comprise half of the content of this qualification, reinforcing the relevance of leadership and marking a significant advancement of the SENCO role. It would seem to be an ideal time for SENCOs to move away from the externally-led referral system towards the shared responsibility of the consultation system.

The implications of the above theories and practices of leadership for SENCOs are fundamental. Firstly, they are operating in a climate where leadership is perceived as a means of improving schools, though perhaps with limited evidence for its impact. Secondly, if they are to demonstrate good leadership, it is unlikely to be heroic, but grounded in practice, where leaders make sense of the context for others, are reflective and people-focused, but also are determined on taking action and making change. Many SENCOs are also working in schools where distributed leadership is the trend. This may have a significant influence on the relevance of leadership to their role and to their views on their role in the consultation process.

Although legislation has failed to resolve whether or not leadership is relevant to the SENCO role, policy guidance aimed at SENCOs continues to suggest that it is. Simultaneously, the expectation that pupils with special educational needs should achieve in line with their peers who do not have special educational needs and the strengthening of equalities legislation could imply that the relevance of leadership to SENCOs is diminishing; as expectations become more universal, the need for a 'champion' possibly declines. While it could be argued that these factors increase the relevance of leadership to SENCOs, legislation has tended towards all school

leaders having a responsibility for special educational needs. The leadership model employed in many schools has developed to one that is often distributed, and yet it could be argued that this does not truly extend to the area of special educational needs. As was observed during the course of this research, the limited number of staff other than the SENCO who are involved in the consultation process would seem to bear that out.

2.4 Inclusion

Inclusion is a global issue but there is no one model of inclusion that fits all societies. Different countries have alternative versions of what inclusion means to them. Inclusion is often viewed as a process and as such is continuing to develop at different rates in different countries, leading to international and national debate. The cultures and politics of countries therefore determine the pace and type of change in relation to the development of their inclusive educational practices.

Towards the end of the last century two United Nations Conferences in particular gave impetus to inclusive education. The first was the 1990 World Conference in Jomtien, Thailand, which promoted the notion of 'education for all'. At this conference delegates from 155 countries re-affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental human right and urged countries to intensify efforts to address the basic learning needs of all and also adopted a World Declaration on 'Education For All'.

The second was The World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, which took place in Salamanca, Spain (UNESCO, 1994). At this

conference it was proposed that inclusion is the most effective type of education. It furthered the objective of 'Education For All' by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely, enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs. The conference adopted the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Educational Needs and devised a Framework for Action. These documents are informed by the principles of inclusion whereby schools and educational establishments would include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs.

In the UK alone definitions and descriptions of inclusion are plentiful. Inclusion is the subject of continual interpretation and re-interpretation. Winzer and Mazurek (2002) stated that researchers, policymakers and practitioners are continually constructing, deconstructing and reconstructing meanings for it. Support services, however, according to Davies and Davies (1989) are aiming to convey the message that the support role is dynamic and responsive, thus diminishing any view that it is prescriptive, with predictable and limited strategies. Conoley and Conoley (1982) inform us that consultation in an inclusive education system does not involve supervising, teaching, co-working, counselling or advising. As stated earlier, a very broad knowledge and skill base will be required.

If, as these two landmark conferences would have us believe, inclusion is essentially about maximising participation in community and culture, then in schools the medium for this is the curriculum. The National Curriculum, when introduced in England and Wales in 1999, stated that:

“Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils” (Department for Education and Employment and Qualification and Curriculum Authority; 1999:30) and included a statutory inclusion statement that is still valid today. This statement informed schools that:

“In planning and teaching the National Curriculum, teachers are required to have due regard to the following principles:

- a) setting suitable learning challenges
- b) responding to pupils’ diverse learning needs
- c) overcoming potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.” (Department for Education and Employment and Qualification and Curriculum Authority; 1999:30).

Whilst the National Curriculum has undergone a number of revisions and transformations the statutory inclusion statement has survived and endured and is still current. It is still referred to when necessary by support services in their work with schools and is generally held to be a central tenet of the pedagogy of an inclusive education system, at least in theory if not always in practice.

2.5 What is a SEN support service?

After Warnock, the intended role and language of the support service changed. The trend since the 90’s has been for central support teachers to support classroom teachers and subject teachers in meeting the needs of children and young people who are displaying difficulties, rather than to use their expertise directly working with the children and young people. (Dyson and Gains, 1993). The work was to be ‘advisory’ rather than ‘remedial’, with a focus on supporting class

teachers responding to their pupils with special educational needs (Blamires and Moore, 2004). Lacey and Lomas (1993) state that the term 'support' is used to describe various groups of people offering advice and skills to aid the integration and general education of children and young people who experience difficulties in learning.

Hart, quoted in "Learning For All 1" states that there is:

"... no generally agreed definition of support teaching' (1992:105). It has already been noted that SEN Support Services work differently in different Local Authorities (LAs). They have developed according to various models. They differ according to function, role, development and personnel. However, legislation over the past two decades has reinforced the need for more collaborative working between professionals. In 1989 Davies and Davies stated that seemingly little research had been conducted into the viability and value of support models and that consequently LAs have evolved their own pattern of provision which tends to reflect the particular philosophy adopted by each authority. It appears that there has been little change in this respect since 1989.

The post-Warnock exhortation to change did not, however, always translate radically into practice. Many support teachers continued to be reluctant to extend their impact much beyond the classroom. However, after the publication of "A Curriculum For All" by the National Curriculum Council (1989), it began to be thought that learners with special educational needs did not need to be taught different things from their peers, or to be 'remediated', but that they needed to be taught the same things as their peers but in different ways. The task for support

services, according to Blamires and Moore (2004), therefore became supporting the development of 'appropriate' differentiation in teaching and learning. This was to respond to a diversity of learners.

There was much debate at this time about the appropriate balance between 'advice' and 'support'. Blamires and Moore argue that support service functions have, in recent years, been compromised by the dual and often competing demands of promoting inclusion and improving standards. Indeed today, for support service teachers, the debate is much more about the appropriate balance between support and challenge. This, however, is still clearly aligned to the standards agenda and school improvement.

Tomlinson (1982) and, more recently, Billington (2002), have suggested that support services are not only irrelevant but actively conspire in the removal of the learner from the mainstream. By extrapolation, it could then be argued that the existence of the SENCO in schools in England and Wales is, in itself, anti-inclusive. It would seem then that support services need to be seen to be in the business of enhancing the professional expertise of teachers through the continuous development of their specialist teaching skills that are shared across different schools. This research will aim to ascertain whether this can be better achieved through process consultation than by other more traditional referral methods.

It is an undoubted fact that schools have become more critical consumers of support services. Ultimately, as Ofsted (2005) points out, the effectiveness of any support service will be judged upon two sets of criteria: pupil progress and the

increased capacity of schools for inclusion. In other words, how well the support provided brings together the two agendas of standards and inclusion.

2.6 Referral methods

Traditionally and historically schools and class teachers had sought solutions to special educational needs issues which relinquished to support service teachers the responsibility for the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties. Or, as Davies and Davies (1989) describe it, they may have expected the support teacher to diagnose the source of the learning problems, list the deficiencies and prescribe the correct dose of activities to be undertaken which would enable the child to 'get better' and therefore catch up in basic skills areas. Many support services adopted a model of practice that supported this expectation. Davies and Davies (1989) questioned this approach, asking whether this support was of value to the recipients and whether the support services were in fact giving the message that problems were located 'within child' and that only external experts could diagnose and help the 'referred' child.

Davies and Davies (1989) asserted that the conventional emphasis on assessment and diagnosis tended to confirm what the class teacher already knew about the 'referred' child or young person. They stated that careful observation of the child or young person in various settings in an attempt to identify the child or young person's understanding of the range of experiences offered, their appropriateness and their motivational context is usually more illuminating and effective. They also state that a commitment to shared and equal responsibility is vital. This is aligned closely to the notion of process consultation.

2.7 SEN Support Service delivery methods

Three clear forms of SEN Support Service delivery exist, according to Lacey and Lomas (1993). They are direct, (involving direct teaching of pupils); indirect, (involving a consultant model where the class teacher is still the key person to deliver to the pupil); and a combination of the two, (involving a combination of direct and indirect). Lacey and Lomas go on to state that the 'expert' myth can lead to class teachers disowning problems and also expecting instant solutions. When these instant or magic solutions are not forthcoming then a barrier between the class teacher and the support member of staff can be created. They advise that it is best to regard support staff as colleagues who have had additional training which can enhance the skills of the class teacher. However, they also warn that once a class teacher has had a negative experience with a member of a support service then often all support service staff will be regarded with suspicion.

2.8 Developing credibility

Developing credibility is vitally important for all SEN support staff. It is not easy to achieve but it is perhaps even harder to achieve when working via consultation which may be viewed as an indirect and less hands-on method of support. Credibility can only be gained through positive experiences and Bowers (1989) asserts that a team effort is relied upon, stating that one person's negative or thoughtless actions can undo the positive work done by others. Davies and Davies (1989) write that credibility is achieved by displaying a sense of professionalism, practical skills, open communication and respect for others. Legitimate credibility starts with job titles and descriptions initially, supported by a positive experience of

effective service delivery. They go on to state that referent credibility is achieved by possessing an awareness of the different methods, approaches and philosophies within each school, and a style which responds to and acknowledges these. Expert credibility involves acting as a catalyst for ideas and approaches whilst acknowledging the skills already possessed by the class teacher.

Responsive and flexible approaches are noted by Davies and Davies (1989) as factors to consider, as are positive professional exchange, perspective and humour, and dialogue with parents/carers. Part of the role of support service staff must be to enhance and develop skills in others. This is a key feature of collaborative working.

Davies and Davies (1989) list a number of skills that they say are required to support collaborative working. These include negotiating skills; communication and interpersonal skills; time and case management; the ability to organise meetings and case conferences; report writing and record keeping; and influencing change as a member of a visiting support service. All of these skills are crucial to the effective delivery of a consultation method of service delivery.

2.9 Modes of working with class teachers

Four key modes of working with class teachers have been identified in the literature, although it is fair to say that most Advisory Teachers, or central support teachers, will use more than one mode in their engagement with schools (Harland, 1990). The 4 modes are:

1. The provisionary mode (1990:36) – this consists of the Advisory Teacher servicing and providing the class teacher with materials and resources that may be of value to the class teacher's teaching. The materials and resources will not necessarily be delivered in person but will be identified. All Advisory Teachers working in the context of this research will use this mode at some time.
2. The hortative mode (1990:36) – Advisory Teachers involved in this research use oral, or occasionally written, communication to pass on information, ideas and advice with the aim of exhorting the class teacher to apply it as a means of extending their classroom practice. This is similar to the didactic approach but has a greater sense of encouragement. The hortative mode explicitly or implicitly advocates certain approaches to teaching of the curriculum through direct communication between the Advisory Teacher and the class teacher. All Advisory Teachers in the context of this research will frequently use this mode.
3. The role-modelling mode (1990:36) – this is the 'I'll show you' mode, in comparison to the 'I'll give you' and 'I'll tell you' modes described above. This mode is less frequently used by the Advisory Teachers involved in this research.
4. The zetetic mode (1990:37) – meaning to proceed or learn through a process of inquiry. This mode presses class teachers to critically examine their current practices in order to identify more clearly what they want pupils to achieve and the ways in which this can be accomplished.

This is a version of the currently favoured 'critical friend' role; demanding yet supportive. It promotes reflective inquiry. It utilises an open-questioning style and is the 'I'll ask you' mode. This is an effective mode when used skilfully, and enhances the consultation process.

2.10 Consultation as a method of service delivery

In "The Family and the School, A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children" Taylor (1994) described consultation as:

".. attempts on the part of specialists to help organisations attain greater efficiency in achieving their objectives" (1994:137). The consultation method of service delivery is an approach to working with others that is respectful of the expertise which already exists in a specific system and context in which a particular concern arises. Dyck and Dettmer (1989) state that special education teachers and classroom teachers have found that the collaborative consultation approach is a promising tool for meeting the special needs of particular groups. They state that the concept of collaborative consultation, used effectively to help in matters of business, health and personal concerns, is new to education. Neel (1981) states that for most of us, the role has usually been that of client, receiving advice from an impartial 'expert', often paying dearly, and then accepting or rejecting as we see fit. In those situations we function within a 'doctor/patient' or 'purchase' mode of service. In these instances the consultation is problem-specific and the advice is not expected to be transferable to other situations.

Consultation is intended to be a positive and proactive process during which the views and expertise of the consultee are heard and help to inform the

development of ideas and proposals for interventions. Consultation is educative and inclusive because it involves sharing and informing. It is iterative and ongoing rather than a one-off process. It is also participatory and inclusive because it is a dialogue amongst professionals. It is action and outcome orientated and must ensure that the views of all participants inform agreed actions (Audit Commission, 1999). Process consultation recognises that in order to successfully implement a change in intervention or provision it is important that key personnel, particularly those affected directly by the change, are able to support the underlying ethos and principles of the proposed changes. The sense of involvement in the creation and outcome of the interventions should generally lead to a more positive response towards the proposed interventions.

Conoley and Conoley (1992) specify the parameters of consultation services as ones where the consultee initiates the service but can then accept or reject the services offered. This is in accordance with Caplan's (1970) notion of a voluntary relationship. The relationship is confidential; is characterised as among peer professionals and is both collaborative and co-ordinate. The relationship provides resources in a cost-effective way and deals only with professional problems, focusing on prevention. The consultant's goals are described as being able to provide an objective point of view and to increase problem-solving skills. Conoley and Conoley (1992) state clearly that consultation is not supervision, collaboration, teaching or psychotherapy. Jordan writes that:

"The essence of consultation is to give away expertise, so that others will be able to assume ownership of their successes in dealing with the problems of learning and behaviour of the children in their charge". (1994:6).

2.11 Goals of Consultation

Watkins and Wagner (1995) describe the goals of consultation as increasing solution-focused problem solving; increasing confidence and competence in coping and developing solutions, and increasing the effectiveness of the resources that are available. Jordan (1994:preface) states the goal of consultation succinctly as:

“.. supplying another person with the skills to work with children in new and different ways”. In the broadest sense the consultant is a change agent, seeking to bring about permanent changes in another’s actions and also in that person’s beliefs about his or her own ability and effectiveness. Much of the skill of consulting is to demonstrate empathy for the feelings of the other and respect for the skills and experiences which the consultee brings to the consulting event.

The professional growth of teachers involves both push and pull: a consultant can open the possibilities of alternative ways of tackling problems provided it is done with respect and openness and with recognition that a skilful consultant and consultee will build trust and recognition by deferring to each other’s knowledge and skills (Little, 1985). It is suggested that consultants should view themselves as change agents in schools. They will need to make an assessment of the current attitudes and beliefs of consultees towards pupil differences and difficulties. They will then be in a position to plan interventions and to work towards their implementation in collaboration with the consultee (Jordan, 1994).

It has been noted that the key features of consultation are identified as being that the person concerned initiates the consultation; the person concerned has

freedom to accept or reject the service; the relationship is peer-professional and collaborative, and concerns are work-related only. Watkins and Wagner (1995) state that the rationale for consultation is that it is a process with an indirect focus which makes more efficient use of time; that skills are generalised to other children; that the person with the day to day contact is the change agent to improve the likelihood of change happening; and that it is aimed to produce wider efficiency and the impact of a helping service on school improvement. This rationale will be tested in the methodology.

A key component of developing and refining effective consultation, according to Dyck and Dettmer (1989), is the evaluation of the consulting process. They suggest the use of a set of questions to assess the consultee's perceptions of the process. These and other evaluation methods will be discussed in the methodology. The benefits of such evaluative methods, according to Dyck and Dettmer, are that problem areas can then be addressed by working with individual teachers to improve consultations and by providing staff-development activities.

2.12 Characteristics of consultation

The characteristics of school consultation have been widely described in the literature (Conoley and Conoley, 1992; Heron and Harris, 1993; Jordan, 1994), and are generally agreed as involving:

a) a triadic and indirect relationship – there is an indirect relationship between the consultant and client, unlike in other professional consultation relationships such as law or business. The consultant and consultee together design services that

the consultee provides to the client, who is usually a pupil. In school-based consultation the client is not usually a direct participant in the interaction but is rather a beneficiary of the process.

b) voluntariness – both consultant and consultee can start and end the relationship at any time. Consultation cannot be a coerced process (Gutkin and Curtis, 1982). The process can only be initiated for as long as it is voluntary.

c) an expert and directional relationship – although it is always emphasised that the consultant and consultee mutually influence each other, and that consultants do not have authority over consultees, the consultation relationship exists only because it is perceived that the consultee has a work-related problem. Therefore, the consultee has the perception that he/she has a problem that cannot be solved without another's expertise. Research supports this concept that teachers prefer consultation in which the consultant offers specific suggestions and clear direction for resolving the problems raised (Erchul, 1992; Witt, Erchul, McKee, Pardue and Wickstrom, 1991). This will be explored in the course of the research.

The number of steps in the consultation process may vary but typically include the six stages of entry; problem identification; planning; intervention; evaluation and exit (Friend and Cook, 2000). Consultants and consultees do not share the same responsibility and accountability (Erchul, 1992). The consultant's primary responsibility is to ensure the process is appropriately followed and to offer assistance. However, consultants do not control consultees and so cannot be held accountable for the success or failure of the consultation outcomes. Consultees have the responsibility to participate in good faith and if they agree to try a strategy

then they should do so appropriately. If this does not happen then it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the consultation. The consultee is also required to gather data and make judgements about whether the problem has been resolved or whether another intervention is needed. In relation to support for pupils with SEN the above responsibilities and accountabilities are relevant and apply in practice. The Advisory Teacher consultant does not control the SENCO consultee and the consultee, if agreeing to try strategies and interventions, should do so appropriately and for the agreed period of time.

2.13 Approaches to consultancy

Bowers (1989) distinguishes 3 fundamental approaches to consultancy: the expert consultant, the doctor consultant and the process consultant and asserts that the whole school approach is largely based on the SEN support teacher operating as a process consultant. The process consultant aims to enlighten and to achieve change by helping the school to look at problems in fresh ways that open up a variety of options for staff to take. Bowers also states that mainstream staff tend to think of central SEN staff as gate-keepers. A whole-school approach is often seen as a top-down initiative and Advisory Teachers are often seen as agents of the Local Authority and therefore the gate-keeper of both information and resources.

It is therefore important that Advisory Teachers develop credibility within the school and possess the required social skills to develop effective working relationships with school-based staff within the necessary professional boundaries. Teachers may feel over-loaded with the specialist nature of the demands and may employ, not necessarily consciously, coping strategies of

withdrawing and filtering. The possibility exists of a knowledge and personal resource gap. Bowers (1989) goes on to state that plenty of 'busy ness' can effectively keep more complex problems at bay. By doing this, issues remain unresolved. However, strategic issues cannot be ignored at either school or Local Authority level.

Dyck and Dettmer (1989) outline 7 steps in a collaborative consultation process as planning; initiating; collecting information; specifying concerns; identifying options; planning together and following-up. These are not dissimilar to the six steps identified by Friend and Cook (2000). Planning involves identifying the major area(s) of concern and the action options. Initiating involves the establishment of rapport, agenda setting and addressing concerns. Collecting information involves assessing available data and identifying areas where more information is needed. The stage of specifying concerns involving listening to and accepting all concerns and also focusing on the pertinent issues. Identifying options involves collaborative problem solving, identifying possible ways forward and selecting one. Planning together is a stage that involves identifying who will be involved and what their respective responsibilities will be, together with goal setting and establishing success criteria. Following up involves planning review meetings to analyse results and either planning further intervention or agreeing closure if goals have been met. These steps will also be reviewed in the methodology.

2.14 Theoretical Perspectives in Consultation

It could be said that there are three theoretical perspectives that are paramount in consultation: mental health consultation (Caplan, 1970; Meyers, Parsons and

Martin, 1979); behavioural consultation (Bergan, 1977; Bergan and Kratochwill, 1990; Bergan and Neumann, 1980); and process consultation (Schein, 1969; Schmuck and Runkel, 1985). These 3 perspectives differ in a number of ways, particularly in terms of how the influence of environmental factors is interpreted. In mental health consultation the focus is on internal forces such as attitudes, motivation and irrational thoughts, whilst in behavioural consultation the focus is on external forces such as environment, punishments and rewards.

However, in process consultation the focus is on the interactive forces of leadership, communication and interpersonal relationships. Process consultation is the theoretical model most commonly in use between support services and schools and is the model operating and examined in this research.

2.15 Process Consultation

The theoretical roots of this model lie in social psychology. Conoley and Conoley (1992) describe it as a problem-solving approach that seeks to make people more aware of the inter-personal transactions that are continually affecting their work productivity and morale. Process consultation is, therefore, a model in which the consultant helps the client to perceive, understand and act upon the problem, and is well suited to address not just the current problem but similar problems in future (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen and Corthouts, 2009). This, according to Dyck and Dettmer (1989), makes it effective and efficient for school settings. Conoley and Conoley (1982) state that in SEN, consultation can be used to provide indirect service to students (clients) by collaborating with teachers (consultees) to help them to identify ways of helping students learn and make progress. The consultant

hopes that the consultee will generalise the new skills and insights to other cases. At this point in time, according to the authors, consultation was neither well understood nor widespread.

Process consultants make people more aware of the interpersonal process events in their environments and how these events affect their work (Schein, 1969). This is very appropriate to education, particularly special educational needs, where problem-solving, conflict management and social and emotional needs are at the fore. In educational settings the concern raised through the consultation process may be about an individual, a group or class or an organisational issue. The aim of consultation is to work with the commitment, expertise and energy of the people within the system and context so as to utilise the resources of the system and to bring about change by collaborative means.

Effective consultation, according to Dyck and Dettmer (1989), requires the right combination of process and content skills. The process skills of active listening, dealing with resistance, conflict resolution and follow-through for constructive feedback are critical processes to the success of the consultation approach. They assert that these process skills are more difficult to acquire than the content skills of teaching techniques, materials and environments. For successful consultation to take place then, they state that each participant requires the skills of co-operation, communication and co-ordination. Effective administrative arrangements are also required to allow the collaborative process to occur.

There are three key issues that affect practice, according to Friend and Cook (2000). They are the impact of consultation on pupil achievement and behaviour;

the extent to which the teachers engaging in consultation follow-through and systematically carry out the agreed interventions, and class teachers' preferences for different approaches in consultation, particularly in terms of the directive versus the collaborative.

The consultant, according to Conoley and Conoley (1992), is interested in improving the interpersonal skills used among adults as well as analysing classrooms for process events. The consultant would look, the writers say, at friendship patterns in a classroom, emergence of leadership and the teacher's ability to create a purposeful, task-oriented environment for their pupils. The ability to influence others, to define and resolve problems, and to maintain sensitivity to the difficulties of others are requisite skills for consultation (Conoley and Conoley, 1992). These skills are viewed as necessary in order to manage the process events in the classroom. Relationship-enhancing skills are also described by Conoley and Conoley, with consultants being required to be open, friendly, flexible and efficient.

Consultees are reported by Conoley and Conoley (1992) to value positive, supportive consultants as much as or more than knowledgeable but authoritarian experts. An awareness of the personal impact of the consultant and the importance of the consultation relationship is therefore seen as basic to all consultation training and practice. Knowing something well does not guarantee that you will help others to know it. Good consultants are described as experts in content and technical skills; in motivating others to learn, in supporting changes in behaviour and the ability to look at issues in new ways.

As support services have suffered cuts due to economic difficulties over the course of the last two decades, so it has been even more important that they can develop and move towards a method of service delivery that supports capacity and confidence building in schools. Watkins and Wagner (1995) state that the goal of consultation is to facilitate 'difference' in schools and educational settings. This is described as not difference for its own sake but the search for 'the difference that makes a difference'. They also state that the process of school consultation necessarily involves collaborative work with educationalists in schools and requires contextual assessment and the involvement of pupils and parents in order to make a difference. When effectively employed, this way of working is expected to lead to the agreed work with schools being largely preventative. Watkins and Wagner (2000) state that the underpinning model of psychology employed is interactionist, systemic and solution-focused.

2.16 Benefits of a consultation approach

What constitutes an effective support model? Is it child-centred support or teacher-centred support? As the class teacher is the key person in influencing the opportunities on offer, it is essential, according to Davies and Davies (1989), for the support service teacher to recognise the sharing of skills and the importance of establishing a shared purpose. When staff are able to find time to come together and recognise that there is a problem that needs to be addressed by collaborative action then the strategies identified and eventually employed are more likely to work.

Dyck and Dettmer (1989) state that the benefits of the consultation approach are what they term the ripple or multiplier effect that enables teachers to more accurately identify and address needs. Bowers (1989) believes that the answer is not as important as the process. So it follows that schools are more likely to get what they want from SEN support services if they know what they want, or at least think they know what they want. Schools often appear to want a doctor/patient or expert/client relationship but the challenge for support services, according to Bowers, is to survive and progress as consultants.

Conoley, Apter and Conoley (1981:113) summarise it by stating that:

“Consultation should not be seen, therefore, as the more knowledgeable consultant giving answers to a puzzled consultee. Rather, it must be viewed as a collaborative problem solving process during which the consultant facilitates the creative, coping skill of the consultee and learns from the consultee about the unique aspects of the problem and the consultee’s situation.” In other words, to be successful, consultation needs more than diagnostic expertise and teaching excellence.

Consultation has been developed in UK support services as a solution to the problem of increasing individual assessment work; more children being labelled as ‘special needs’; few significant positive outcomes; fewer resources and less problem-solving in the system. Gutkin and Curtis (1990) report a number of representative findings of the implementation of a consultation approach to psychological services including a drop in student referral rates; increased teacher effectiveness due to generalisation of skills learned; improvements in the learning

and progress of underachieving children; improved problem-solving skills in teachers and a change in attitude of teachers from viewing problems as being within-child to more interactional in nature. It is not documented whether such findings can also be attributed to teaching SEN support services.

2.17 Barriers to consultation

Certain factors can inhibit the development of an effective consultation programme. Conoley and Conoley (1992) describe the most potent barriers being key players not believing in the efficacy of consultation; the lack of appropriate training for the consultant; pressures of work not allowing for indirect service involvement and decision makers in the school viewing the consulting role as a threat.

The greatest obstacle to consultation in schools, however, is perhaps the belief that external professionals must be in direct contact with the client if complex problems are to be addressed effectively (Conoley and Conoley, 1992). This view is based on two assumptions: the first being that problems reside within clients, and the second that consultation is nothing more than a watered-down version of intervention. Conoley and Conoley state that there is insufficient capacity in the system to be able to meet the needs of children on an individual basis. This is also the case for SEN support services who have finite resources for which they are accountable.

Resistance to consultation is often indicated through subtle behaviours and can be

difficult to recognise (Friend and Cook, 2000). The function of such resistance is usually a means to try and avoid change. The main indicators to resistance described by Friend and Cook are refusal to participate; giving verbal support but not following up with actions; displacement of responsibility; deferring to a future time as a delaying tactic and relying on past practice. Refusal to participate is rarely given bluntly and is more likely to involve a plausible excuse as to why participation is not possible. Displacement will often involve saying that others, such as the headteacher, will not allow participation and relying on past practice will involve some level of justification for maintaining the status quo.

Persuasion is cited as a critical strategy to use as a response to resistance and one that should not be under-estimated or over-looked (Friend and Cook, 2000; Heron and Harris, 1993; Gutkin and Curtis, 1982). Consultation and collaboration in schools does not occur naturally, according to Dyck and Dettmer (1989). They state that barriers to success include lack of training for roles, misconceptions about roles, time constraints, and conflicts with existing administrative structures and educational values. They express the view that these barriers can be overcome by training. Another barrier to effective consulting, according to Dyck and Dettmer, is misinterpreting the role. They state that it can be viewed as 'professional ineptness' or an avoidance to 'getting stuck in' but that this can be overcome if the process is promoted by senior staff within the school. Effective evaluation can also be useful in countering resistance.

One of the most challenging barriers cited by Dyck and Dettmer (1989) is lack of time. It is acknowledged that finding time to meet is never easy and that although

external staff have some autonomy in terms of planning their time, school-based staff rarely have this flexibility. Consultation is unlikely to be successful if it is hurried and perfunctory. This links back to the importance of having the support of senior staff who will then support the need to find the time, and also highlights the need for some creativity, such as the headteacher or SENCO of a primary school covering the class in order to allow the classteacher to be released to participate in the consultation process.

Further barriers were identified by Howley, Howley and Pendarvis (1986). They included trying to address too many solutions at a time, as well as the possibility of introducing personal biases inappropriately. These barriers would be formidable when applied to staff who are already resistant to the process. As Margolis and McGettigan (1988) state, classroom teachers are reluctant to integrate pupils for whom they must alter instruction. This is because they are expected to change their ways of working with children. Change requires new ways of thinking and doing. It is difficult, and demands excessive effort and self-analysis (Fullan, 1985).

Consultees therefore predictably exhibit resistance to the possibility of having to change what they are comfortable with doing. Resistance is a very natural and almost inevitable outcome of being placed in the role of consultee (Jordan, 1994). While the resistance may range from mild caution to extreme anger, it does not usually stem directly from the consultant's role, skills or expertise, but from factors that are internally triggered within the consultee. It is an expression of underlying fears of loss of control and, consequently, vulnerability. If the consultant responds to it defensively then he/she misses the opportunity to help the consultee to deal

with the fears. The art of dealing with teacher resistance, according to Jordan (1994), is to first of all recognise the resistance and then to resist the temptation to counter the resistance by defending yourself. There is also a need to consider why the consultee is exhibiting the resistance and the consultant should support the teacher in expressing those feelings.

2.18 Behaviour Consultations

Rosenfield (1991) states that behaviour-related consultations have often been utilised as an expert model focused on client behaviour and problem solving, but a more collaborative consultative style is recommended. A key aspect of effective communication is to understand that it is a shared responsibility. Rosenfield states that consultants, whether they are Educational Psychologists or Advisory Teachers, often find that well-researched and potentially effective techniques for behaviour management, such as applied behaviour analysis, are unacceptable to classroom teachers. Behaviour-related consultations, according to Gallessich (1985), have traditionally utilised an expert or clinical model in order to support the consultee's lack of knowledge and skills in addressing the client's behavioural difficulties.

2.19 Key Notions in Consultation

The main psychological models that underpin consultation are:

- a) Personal Construct Psychology – this can be applied to social systems.

Kelly, cited in Blowers and O'Connor stated that the fundamental hypothesis of personal construct theory is that:

“..a person’s processes are psychologically channelled by the ways in which he anticipates events” (1996:10). Kelly sees a person as essentially a form of motion. The ways in which a person anticipates events are defined by his personal constructs; a construct being a way in which some things are interpreted as being alike and at the same time different from other things. Winter states:

“When people share in a common pool of events including each other, but by virtue of their position sample these events differently, their constructions of experience will develop to complement each other. The complementation will produce a social system which exhibits greater complexity of stable organisation than exists in the constructions of any individual contributing to it” (1994:53). This notion of a complementary outcome can also be applied to the process of consultation.

- b) Symbolic Interactionism – the principles and hypotheses in an interactionist and systemic based model of consultation, according to Lewin (1946), are that whatever difficulties the child or young person has in relation to learning, in its broadest sense, the school can still make a difference. The most useful psychological model for understanding human behaviour for our purposes is, according to Lewin, interactionist and systemic and includes the understanding that behaviour is a function of the person and the situation.
- c) Systems Thinking – within systems thinking there are ideas from solution focused brief therapy and narrative therapy. This means that we are interested in the expectations, beliefs and meanings that a child or young

person has about learning and being a pupil in a school setting. We are also interested in the expectations, beliefs and meanings that the school has of these pupils and their learning, and also in the interaction between them. It follows that we would also be interested in the classroom setting and in the child/young person's interaction with aspects of classroom organisation and management and how the story that has developed for the child, school or family about the child's difficulties might be a thin story which is holding back the child or young person's progress.

- d) Solution focused brief therapy – the basic assumptions of this way of working, according to De Shazer and Berg (1992), are that focusing too much on problems or their causes can increase problems and that, conversely, focusing more on solutions will be more likely to increase solutions. Sometimes the smallest change can set wider changes in motion, and for this to happen there needs to be a shift in focus towards resources, positives and strengths. The essence of a solution focused approach is to work with the person rather than the problem and to increase solutions rather than problems.
- e) Narrative therapy – this approach separates the person from the problem and, in doing so, allows pupils a voice and the space to explore their own capabilities. It gives them the freedom to implement new strategies and ways of working in a supportive and respectful environment, Morgan (1986).
- f) Social constructionism – this approach, according to Gergen:
“.. invites the creation of new, more inhabitable ways of going on together”

(2003:5). Burr states that: “..social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (2003:3).

2.20 Collaboration or consultation?

Collaboration is not a synonym for consultation (Friend and Cook, 2000). It has no clear definition, though most authors seem to agree that it includes working together in a supportive and mutually beneficial relationship. Friend and Cook define collaboration as:

“ .. a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work towards a common goal” (2000:6). This is not dissimilar to the definitions of consultation. Friend and Cook (2000) describe the characteristics of collaboration as voluntariness; parity amongst participants; sharing mutual goals; sharing responsibility for participation and decision-making, and sharing of resources and accountability for outcomes.

If schools are seen as a reflection of a larger society, then the trend for collaboration among nations makes it apparent why collaboration is a prominent trend in schools. Some innovations that affect schools are fads that fade away relatively quickly, eg open-plan classrooms. Friend and Cook (2000) argue that such innovations have no permanence because there is no on-going societal demand for them. However, it is argued, when societal needs lead to changes in schools, eg computer instruction or co-operative learning, then the impact is likely to be long-lasting.

Consultation is a related concept to collaboration. It is a service model that teachers may use when working together in order to accomplish goals.

Consultation is a process in which a teacher requests another professional to assist in problem-solving concerning specific pupil needs. Consultation may be viewed as an application of collaboration in SEN Support Services (Friend and Cook, 2000). All models of consultation can be implemented collaboratively. Each model of consultation can be implemented by a consultant who may or may not emphasise the use of a collaborative style of interaction. Effective consultation will use different styles of interaction under different circumstances. Sometimes a directive style may be more appropriate, and sometimes a non-directive, supportive or empathic style is most appropriate.

2.21 Pupil Participation in the Consultation Process

Historically, children have been perceived as not having a right or even the ability to participate in decision-making about issues which concern them. In 1989 the orthodoxy was questioned by the introduction of landmark legislation in England, i.e. The 1989 Children Act, which introduced the concept of the Paramountcy Principle, and the 1989 United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, which challenged current views and existing legislation about how pupils should engage with their educational experience.

Article 12 and 13 said that:

“Children, who are capable of forming views, have a right to receive and make known information, to express an opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them. The views of the child should be given due weight according to

age, maturity and capability of the child” (cited in DfES, 2001:27). The debates about children’s rights and services have been on-going since 1989 and most recently re-emerged in public consciousness in 2003 through the Every Child Matters agenda. This was placed on the statute books in 2004 in the most recent Children Act. Interestingly, children and young people are not usually required to actively participate in the consultation process. Parental permission will be sought before consultation commences but it is rare that the permission of the child or young person is sought. The process in operation in this research is that the consultant, whether Advisory Teacher or Educational Psychologist, meets with the consultee who is the ‘owner’ of the problem. The consultee will be the SENCO, the class teacher or, very occasionally, the teaching assistant. The consultation will usually revolve around perceived difficulties with the ‘client’, who is the pupil, but the client may, in many instances, never meet with the consultant nor even be aware that they are the client in an on-going process.

2.22 Definition of consultation for the research

Before looking in detail at the scope and aims of the research, it will be necessary to determine a definition of the term ‘consultation’ that will be employed for the purposes of this research. The Pocket Oxford Dictionary (1972) tells us that consultation is “to take counsel (*with*); to seek information from (person, book, &c.); to take into consideration, or do one’s best for (person’s feelings, the interests of). The Reader’s Digest Universal Dictionary (1987) defines consultation as “the act or procedure of consulting”; consult being defined as “to seek advice or

information from; to have regard for; to exchange views". The Audit Commission defines consultation as:

"..a process of dialogue that leads to a decision" (1999:56).

Definitions can be found in the literature. Caplan, recorded in "Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology:A Textbook for Trainees and Practitioners" defines consultation as:

"..a voluntary, non-supervisory relationship between professionals from different fields established to aid his/her professional functioning" (2008:141). Conoley and Conoley state that consultation is:

".. a problem-solving approach that seeks to make people more aware of the inter-personal transactions that are continually affecting their work, productivity and morale" (1992:12). Schein (1969) saw consultation as a helping relationship, saying that the mutual nature of this relationship. i.e. with the consultant working with, and not for, the client is a keynote of the process consultation philosophy.

For the purposes of this research a teacher-driven definition of consultation was employed. The definitions offered by teachers have certain common themes running through them, but there are subtle differences which may have an effect on their engagement in the process and, consequently, the effectiveness of the consultation. Teachers, mainly SENCOs but not all, who have participated in consultation in the role of consultee were interviewed during the course of the research and were asked to give their own personal definition of consultation. Some of the responses are listed below:

Teacher 1: "Consultation is a way of working with the Advisory Teacher to try and

find a way of understanding a pupil's difficulties and what interventions they may need to help them make progress".

Teacher 2: "Consultation is more than a one-off event. It is a way of analysing where a pupil is in their learning and identifying next steps".

Teacher 3: "Consultation is a problem-solving process that looks at the pupil in context. It may relate to the pupil's learning or behaviour difficulties and may involve the Advisory Teacher or the Educational Psychologist or, occasionally, both".

Teacher 4: "Consultation is a way of working with the Advisory Teacher that takes a lot of SENCO time. It involves discussions, observations and meetings with parents. Pupils are not often assessed to identify their learning difficulties".

Teacher 5: "It is a partnership between school and the Advisory Teacher. Information about the pupil is shared and actions are agreed to support progress in the classroom".

Teacher 6: "Consultation is very solution-focused. It involves the SENCO or classteacher working with the Advisory Teacher or Educational Psychologist to identify strategies or interventions that will help a pupil make progress in an identified area such as phonics".

Teacher 7: "Consultation takes a lot of time from the SENCO or class teacher. It involves a lot of our time but does not always mean that the Advisory Teacher spends much time with the pupil. They observe the pupil in the classroom but do not always carry out any assessments. Sometimes we only get told what we already know".

Teacher 8: "Consultation recognises the class teacher's knowledge of the pupil

and their expertise. It is a supportive framework that enables the Advisory Teacher to engage in respectful challenge in order to examine a school's practices and approaches to inclusion. It takes far more of the SENCO's time but is more productive as it enables us to transfer what we learn to pupils with similar difficulties".

The common theme of these definitions is that of partnership working and of finding solutions to pupil-related difficulties. Teacher 1 linked consultation to understanding the nature of difficulties and identifying interventions. Teacher 2 views consultation very similarly to Teacher 1, but states that it is not just a one-off event. Teacher 3 clarifies the problem-solving element of consultation, stating that it can be applied to both learning and behaviour difficulties. Teacher 4 focuses on the SENCO's participation in the consultation process and the demand it makes on the SENCO's time. Teacher 5 focuses on partnership and uses the partnership language of 'share' and 'agree'. Teacher 6's view is similar to Teacher 4's in terms of the demands on the SENCO's time, whilst Teacher 8 focuses on the partnership aspect of consultation and its' productivity when solutions are transferred to similar situations.

The effective engagement of school-based teachers in the consultation process is crucial if the process is to have any lasting impact, hence the importance of the teacher-driven definitions of consultation. Reflecting upon the various academic and dictionary definitions of consultation, together with the definitions offered by teachers I have, for the purposes of this research, exercised my discretion in favour of the definition given by Teacher 6, namely:

“Consultation is very solution-focused. It involves the SENCO or class teacher working with the Advisory Teacher ... to identify strategies or interventions that will help a pupil make progress in an identified area such as phonics”. This definition links most closely with Schein’s notion of the ‘helping relationship’ that involves working with and not for the client, in this research the client being the SENCO or class teacher, and this will be the definition employed throughout this research.

2.23 The Research Question

The research question is pivotal to the research. It drives the direction of the activities that will then need to be undertaken in order for it to be answered.

Thomas (2009:27) states:

“Research begins with a purpose and a question, not a research design.”

At the start of the research the question I wanted to explore was:

“Is consultation an effective method for SEN support service delivery?”

Following the literature review, my research question has been refined as follows:

What are the characteristics of an effective consultation system for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teachers support to schools, and what are the characteristics of an ineffective consultation system?

This question is both situational - investigating and describing what is happening during the process of consultation – and descriptive, trying to understand what is happening in that process. In proceeding with the field work it was necessary that the design of the case study was constructed in such a way as to enable the research question to be answered. This is considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Summary of the Data Collection

The vehicle for the collection of the data in this research is a case study, the definition of which, according to The Encarta Dictionary, is “an analysis of a particular case or situation used as a basis for drawing conclusions in similar situations”. The case study, as the medium for my data collection, involved looking in great detail, depth and from all angles at how the process of consultation operated. Being by its nature multi-faceted, the case study involved a number of elements, the key ones being interviews and observations. In this research the case study involved two primary schools which were selected on the basis of local knowledge. They were schools that appeared to have significantly contrasting views and experiences of consultation, one being pro-consultation and one being a more reluctant participant in the process.

The initial stage of the data-gathering process involved semi-structured interviews with six consultees (SENCOs) and with six consultants (Advisory Teachers). Three consultees were identified, using local knowledge, to be pro-consultation and three to be less than enthusiastic about the process. All the consultants had received the same initial training in consultation. The data from these interviews was analysed using the constant comparison method and then collated in concept maps which are discussed and summarised in 4.1.

Initially I had considered the use of a questionnaire as the method for collecting data from the SENCOs and Advisory Teachers because it seemed a relatively quick method of gathering data in response to the research questions. However, I was also aware of the limitations of this method, as stated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison:

“The attractions [of the questionnaire] have to be counterbalanced by the time taken to develop, pilot and refine the questionnaire, by the possible unsophistication and limited scope of the data that is collected, and from the likely limited flexibility of response” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003:245).

Other issues with the use of the questionnaire as one of the main methods of collecting data are concerned with the validity and verification of the data collected (Anderson, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). Therefore, after consideration of the research issue and the information needed in order to answer the research question I decided that a qualitative approach using interviews and observations rather than a quantitative approach using questionnaires would be more appropriate to this research in terms of providing information and insight. The questionnaire can be viewed as deceptively difficult to design, analyse and interpret whilst the interview can be advantageous due to its adaptability (Bell, 2005).

I did recognise that one of the constraints of the interviews would be the small sample size, which does limit any inferences or conclusions that may be drawn from the research. However, it did enable me to investigate motives and feelings and follow up ideas if necessary, so promoting insights and elucidation of high

quality data. Also, the interview method is subjective and qualitative and did, in my opinion, provide more surprising and in-depth information than the information I may have gathered from a questionnaire. According to Anderson (1998) the interview has the advantage of gaining the respondent's confidence before asking what otherwise may be interpreted as difficult or complex questions. Following the interviews, observations were then carried out on consultation meetings in two primary schools, selected for the reasons described earlier. A total of eight observations were conducted, four in each of the schools. Again, the data from these observations was analysed and is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2 Teachers in SEN Support Services – the key group for the research

As has been seen in the literature, there is no one model in place for the delivery of central SEN support. Support services operate differently in different local authorities and their role and purpose differs significantly too. As has been stated, in some support services the teachers deliver direct teaching support to pupils whereas in others they work indirectly with pupils through delivery methods such as consultation. In yet other services, teachers may operate a system of both direct and indirect support.

As stated in Chapter 1, teachers in support services who deliver direct teaching support to pupils, such as Qualified Teachers of the Deaf or Qualified Teachers of the Visually Impaired, or teachers who are delivering direct teaching support to pupils in receipt of a Statement of Special Educational Needs, usually pupils with dyslexia, will not be the focus of this research. Teachers in support services whose main role and purpose is to build capacity within schools and who therefore do not

deliver direct teaching support to individual pupils will be the focus of the research. These are the support service teachers whose method of service delivery is delivered through consultation and who will be referred to, in this research, as Advisory Teachers. All of their activities in schools are underpinned by the promotion of inclusion and inclusive practices.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Lewis informs us that “Research with human participants is an intrusive process” (2000:3). It is essential that ethical considerations should underpin every stage of the research in order to ensure that the rights of participants are safeguarded. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) state that educational research must be carried out with an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, quality and academic freedom (2011). In conducting this research project I was continually mindful to ensure that participants were treated fairly and that their rights were safeguarded. Following discussion with participants where the research was explained in detail, they all individually gave voluntary informed consent prior to the start of their involvement. In these discussions I ensured that they understood why their participation was necessary, how their information was to be used and how and why it was going to be reported. Participants were informed that they would see interview questions and observation proformas in advance of them being used, in order to reduce any sense of intrusion and to put them at ease as much as possible. They were also informed that they would be sent transcripts of the interviews so that they could check them for accuracy prior to their being used in the data analysis.

Participants had the right to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason. At all points of their involvement it was implicit that the SENCOs had the option to remove themselves from the research at any time. This was the same for Advisory Teachers. I was never asked by any of the SENCOs (or Advisory Teachers) if they could withdraw if they wanted to, but we engaged in a number of conversations or contacts where the research was described; where their agreement was sought; where their questions were answered and where I expressed my appreciation for them agreeing to be involved. Also, they received a copy of their transcripts to check for accuracy, and so it was implicit on a number of occasions and levels that their involvement was voluntary and as such that implied that they could withdraw at any time. An example of the content of an initial discussion with a SENCO is included in Appendix 5 (p.304).

Additional safeguards for participants were the assurance that their involvement would be confidential, anonymous and that the storage of data gathered from them would be in a locked filing cabinet at my home and not kept in an office location. Practical applications of these ethical guidelines during the research project are described in more detail in sections 3.7 to 3.20 inclusive.

3.4 Awareness of bias in the research

In undertaking this research, which I have already stated is research of a situation 'as is', it was essential that I was not only aware of the possibility of bias but that I pro-actively took all measures necessary to ensure that the research was free of bias. Bias can be described as unknown or unacknowledged error created during the design, measurement, sampling, procedure or choice of the problem studied. I

would assert that I have been fully aware of all possible areas where bias could have occurred and have been vigilant to ensure that this has been minimised as much as is possible.

As the research was to be undertaken in the local authority where I was employed and was to involve Advisory Teachers for whom I was line-manager, together with SENCOs that I know through my work with schools, it was particularly important for me to be aware of and to take steps to address and eliminate, as far as possible, any element of bias. In terms of design bias I identified the validity problems in terms of the research sample and ensured that the 'most or least' were not been selected in order to address the possible problem of regression. In terms of measurement bias and sampling bias I took reasonable steps to ensure that Advisory Teachers involved in the research were fully aware that this was a voluntary activity on their part and that their responses would be confidential to the research; also that the sampling of SENCOs included those who were known to be for and against consultation, but who still actively participated in the process.

Possible procedural bias was avoided by ensuring that interviews and observations were carried out under conditions that were known and agreed by participants in advance and could not therefore be described as adverse conditions. Problem bias has been avoided and addressed by ensuring that the research question has evolved and been refined in the light of the literature review, together with the continual focus on the avoidance of bias.

Whilst continually being aware of bias and taking all reasonable actions to avoid it I have also been mindful of how difficult this can be in practice. This has been articulated by Gregory, in “Bias in Research Studies”, as follows:

“While some study designs are more prone to bias, its presence is universal. It is difficult or even impossible to completely eliminate bias....therefore the goals are to minimize bias...” (Radiology, 2006, 238, 780-789, radiology.rsna.org).

One particular element of the field work that was particularly susceptible to bias was in relation to engaging Advisory Teachers and SENCOs to participate in the research by being interviewed by myself or by agreeing to be observed in a consultation meeting. As the line manager of a team of SEN Advisory Teachers it was necessary that I was especially careful to ensure that they were fully aware of their right to choose whether or not to participate, and also their right to give their own opinion with the guarantee of total confidentiality. Similarly, with SENCOs, it was essential that they understood that it was their choice whether to participate or not and that they were assured of confidentiality. I also recognised that I would need to be extremely self-aware of my role in the fieldwork and that this would require thorough preparation on my part, together with reflection on all aspects of the information-gathering process to ensure that I had taken all steps to minimise, if not eliminate, the possibility of bias on my part.

3.5 Training in consultation for consultees and consultants

The definitions of consultation given by teachers in 2.22 are of particular interest to the research because they are definitions that have been decided upon by these teachers, based on their own practical experience of working in a consultation

system. None of the school-based teachers who were asked to be interviewed to give their definition of consultation had received any training in consultation itself. This means that their views and, therefore, their definitions of consultation were based on what they had been told by Advisory Teachers and/or Educational Psychologists working in their schools and on what they had observed and experienced through their involvement in the process.

The Advisory Teachers, on the other hand, had all received formal training that was delivered by the Principal Educational Psychologist of a London borough where consultation had been the model for the delivery of Educational Psychology support for over a decade. This training was delivered over two days and was mandatory training attended jointly by the Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists of the authority in which the research field work was carried out. The training took place in the summer term prior to the introduction of the model to schools in the autumn term for the new school year. It should be noted that although the Advisory Teachers (and Educational Psychologists) received training in consultation, they did not have a choice in its introduction as the method of service delivery any more than the SENCOs did; this had been a management decision. However, despite the fact that Advisory Teachers had not had any choice in undergoing training in consultation, it could still be argued that it resulted in an unequal power relationship with SENCOs on more than one level. The SENCOs may have seen, or even still see, that the Advisory Teachers, due to their training, know more about consultation than they do. This could link in to the continued practice of the expert/patient model of consultation in some schools.

The SENCOs may, due to this training being delivered to Advisory Teachers but not to themselves, see the Advisory Teacher as the gate-keeper to a level of SEN knowledge and expertise that they are not privy to. The fact that the SENCOs did not receive training was not intended to be manipulative but was, rather, pragmatic, in the sense that managers felt that there was insufficient time to organise central training for all SENCOs and, even if it had been organised, not all SENCOs would have attended. A decision had been made that consultation as the method of service delivery and engagement with schools for both Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists would be implemented in September, the start of the next academic year. Their training was not able to be arranged until near the end of the Summer Term, leaving little time to embed a new way of working within the team and train schools as well. Whilst it was not considered a manipulative decision, it could perhaps be described as a proselytising decision. Reflecting on that decision now I question why it was thought that a lack of training for schools was acceptable and also why lack of time prior to the start of the school year was thought to be a valid reason.

At no point in any discussion about consultation training was it considered a possibility, let alone good practice, that Advisory Teachers, Educational Psychologists and SENCOs could have engaged in the training together. Interestingly, on reflecting back on the training received and reviewing the handouts and notes from the training sessions, the possibility of training for SENCOs was never raised by the presenter, an experienced practitioner in consultation, nor was it raised as a question by any Advisory Teacher and Educational Psychologist attendees. This decision not to offer training to SENCOs

has perhaps led to them being, or maybe just feeling, one step behind the Advisory Teachers in the implementation of the consultation process.

Following the training the Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists were informed that they were to group themselves into triads and they were allocated a proportion of their professional development allotment, together with some time taken from team meeting sessions, in order to practice and rehearse the language and process of consultation. The triads were formed so that these rehearsal sessions would take the form of one member of the triad role-playing the consultant (although it could be argued that this was not technically role-playing as this would be their role in schools), one member role-playing the consultee and the third member being the observer who would give feedback at the end of the session. They were given consultation scenarios to role-play, but were also given the latitude to use real situations from their experiences in schools that they felt would be useful scenarios to re-play. Their roles in the triad were to be rotated so that at the end of the allocated sessions each member of staff would have had the opportunity to role-play both consultant and consultee and to both give and receive feedback. It was stressed that feedback was to be constructive, focusing on both the positive (more of 'x'; I liked the phrase 'y' because, etc) and the areas for development (needed to be more solution-focused; consultee needed to be given greater opportunity to speak; increase use of active listening etc).

Once the allocated time for these follow-up sessions had been used the Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists were encouraged to continue to meet in their triads as a means of peer support, both to share good practice and to provide

an opportunity for trouble-shooting. The majority of the triads continued for about a further term meeting, on average, monthly but they then tended to phase out due to staff feeling either that they no longer needed them or that they could no longer spare the time.

When the triads were introduced, staff were given the freedom to self-select their triad partners as it was felt by team managers that they would then feel more comfortable in the role-playing situations. The Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists were told that, as they worked together in schools and as such would each be introducing consultation to the schools and their SENCOs, that they may find it more useful to form triads with the colleagues with whom they 'shared' schools rather than just forming triads within their own professional groups. However, in practice, the triads that were formed were either Advisory Teacher triads or Educational Psychologist triads; none were mixed.

Another element of the support that Advisory Teachers (and Educational Psychologists) received as part of their initial training was the development of 'scripts'. These scripts were written by senior staff and were to be used by both Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists in their first and early meetings in schools when they would be explaining to Head teachers and SENCOs what consultation was and why it had been introduced as the method for service delivery for both professional groups. The scripts also included a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section, which was developed to anticipate the sort of questions and queries that might be raised by schools. The scripts were not literal scripts in the sense that the Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists were required to learn them and then 'parrot them' in schools, nor were they scripts to

be read to Heads and SENCOs in schools. Rather, they were a script of bullet points with key phrases, intended to promote a consistent message and to be used as an aide-memoire but not recited or read out.

The primary purpose of these scripts was that all schools would receive a consistent message about what consultation was and why it was being introduced as the method of service delivery; the same language and the same key phrases would be used by all visiting staff in all schools. They were also designed to ensure that all schools received the same message and so had the same understanding of what consultation was and why it would be the new modus operandi for the central SEN support services. The secondary purpose of the scripts was to re-enforce the understanding of all central staff about consultation and to act as a prompt for them in their conversations with schools and with each other.

For some SENCOs, the first time they heard that consultation was to be introduced as the method of service delivery by Advisory Teachers and Education Psychologists was at the first Inclusion Partnership Meeting of the school year. Head Teachers had been informed previously, both at a Head Teachers' Forum meeting and at a Head Teachers' half-termly Briefing Session. Both of these meetings are on a regular calendar of Head Teacher meetings and cover wide-ranging issues, not just SEN-related issues. They were meetings that were well-attended by Head Teachers but not attended by all Head Teachers, and so some schools had no knowledge of the introduction to consultation prior to the Inclusion Partnership Meeting.

It also became evident, at the first Inclusion Partnership Meetings, that even when Head Teachers had attended one or both of these central meetings, they had not necessarily shared this information with their SENCOs. It is not known if that is because they viewed the information as unimportant (perhaps an indicator of their attitude towards SEN?) or simply because they had, in their opinion, more important information to impart and so they simply forgot. Informal feedback from Advisory Teachers suggested that about 40% of SENCOs had already been informed of the introduction of consultation prior to the Inclusion Partnership Meetings, meaning that the majority of SENCOs were to hear about the introduction of the consultation process for the first time at their Inclusion Partnership Meeting.

In practice, schools i.e. Head Teachers and SENCOs, were informed that the central SEN support services had made a decision to change their method of service delivery. The schools did not have an opportunity to comment on it prior to its inception, nor did they have the opportunity to attend any training to develop their understanding of the theory behind the practice. This would undoubtedly have had an impact on the power relationship between the support services and the schools and - more importantly for the purposes of this research - on the power relationship between the SENCOs and the Advisory Teachers. The SENCOs were straight away put in a position of 'catch-up', as it is almost a certainty that some of them would never have heard of consultation in relation to SEN support. It was almost as if the Advisory Teachers were in a track race and were holding the baton and the SENCOs were racing to catch up and take hold of it. If they were thought to be too far behind then the Advisory Teacher figuratively

accelerated and lapped them, using the baton to give them a prod to urge them on but never releasing the baton of consultation into their hands.

As has been stated, the SENCOs did not have the opportunity to receive formal training but had to rely on the skills of their attached Advisory Teacher and Educational Psychologist to inform and 'train' them. This left them vulnerable to both the communication skills of the visiting staff and to the interpretation that they chose to give it. Whilst all Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists had received training, there was no guarantee that they would have opted for consultation over referral if they had had a choice, so, despite their training and their scripts, they could still have influenced the schools' understanding of consultation in a less-than-positive way if they had so chosen.

At the same time as introducing consultation to schools in the borough the central SEN services also introduced a system of time allocation, meaning that all schools were allocated a certain number of support sessions per year from an attached Advisory Teacher (and from an attached Educational Psychologist). A session equated to half a day, a three hour period, and the number of sessions allocated was determined by a formula, the elements of which were numbers on roll (60%), numbers on SEN Register at School Action Plus and above (20%), and the school's place on the borough's continuum of effectiveness list, a measure linked to their most recent Ofsted grading (20%). This formula was selected because:

- a) it recognised school size and so conformed to the Warnock notion of 20%

SEN

- b) it did not place the greatest emphasis on numbers on the SEN Register and therefore did not give schools a perverse incentive to over-identify SEN in order to get more support sessions
- c) the inclusion of school improvement data in terms of Ofsted grading ensured that SEN was seen as a whole-school issue and a school improvement issue, not just a 'bolt-on'

The system of time allocation was also introduced to support the introduction of consultation. The previous referral system had operated in such a way that schools had to make a paper-based request (referral) for support from the SEN Support services and this had, at times, degenerated in to a system of 'he who shouts loudest gets most support' as certain schools were more persistent and vociferous in expressing their request for support, sometimes enlisting support from School Improvement Advisers or even writing to the Director of Education to plead their case.

The introduction of this system of time allocation interested and intrigued schools and was received extremely positively. SENCOs liked the fact that they had a known amount of support sessions for the academic year and also had a named Advisory Teacher (and Educational Psychologist) with whom they could build a close working relationship and who was a consistent point of contact for between-visit support via the telephone or email. The introduction of time allocation was so well-received that it over-shadowed the introduction of consultation, even though it was introduced specifically to support the process of consultation. Without exception schools across the borough welcomed the introduction of time allocation

and consultation was perhaps seen as necessary if the model of time allocation was to be successful and therefore retained, and so any reservations, concerns or grumbles about consultation were kept at the individual level, by which I mean raised with their visiting support service professional but never raised with anyone at a more senior level – certainly no calls to the Director of Education – and so there was never a need to justify or defend the introduction of consultation at a strategic or systemic level. It is unquestionable that the introduction of time allocation supported the introduction of the consultation model of service delivery on several levels.

3.6 The Case Study

A case study is a study of a situation. It can be defined as an analysis of a particular case or situation used as a basis for drawing conclusions in similar situations. In this research the case study could be described as a combination of the explanatory and the descriptive types (Yin, 2011), each of which have their own characteristics but with significant overlaps between them. The explanatory case study looks at the 'how and why' whereas the descriptive case study suits a 'what' research question (Yin, 2009). This research involves looking at 'how' the system of consultation in question is operating and 'why' that is the case. Yin states that "Explanatory cases can suggest important clues to cause and effect relationships..." (2003:xvii) and this is of particular relevance when looking at the respective roles and the understanding of the roles of the consultants and consultees. However, the research question (2.23, p53) is a 'what?' question as it promises to describe some characteristics of an effective system of consultation,

thus making this a combination case study. The research question could accurately be described as a broad question, thus reinforcing the appropriateness of the case study as the vehicle for this research:

“..a case study is an appropriate way to answer broad research questions by providing us with a thorough understanding of how the process develops in this case..” (Swanborn, 2010:3).

Whereas Yin (2011) describes case studies as a variety of ‘types’, Wieviorka (1992) encourages a distinction between subject and object. In this research my subject is the participants and their schools and my object is to understand the dynamics of consultancy. It has been noted that there are overlaps in this research between the explanatory and descriptive types of case study and it can also be noted that there is another dimension of overlaps in terms of subject and object (Yin, 2011; Wieviorka, 1992), which in turn link back to the ‘how and why’ and the ‘what’ discussed earlier.

The role of theory is to guide the design and data collection for the case study and to relate it to the appropriate research literature (Yin, 2011). Yin also states that as theory helps to design a case study so it can also become the vehicle for generalising the case study’s results. This understanding of the role of theory in the case study is applicable to this research project. This research, which is investigating effective and ineffective characteristics of a system ‘as is’ could be said to subscribe to the notion of theory building as opposed to theory testing (Woodside, 2010).

The role of action research in the case study is self-evident. Action research, as the term implies, combines the two elements of research and application. It could be compared to learning from experience. The term action research was first used by Kurt Lewin to describe “research that will help the practitioner” and a “circle of planning, action and fact finding about the result of the action” were described (Lewin, 1946:34). Taylor (1994) states that its’ intention is to promote change at systems level, and that it is based on collaboration that is not led by one party in dominance over the other. Taylor states that it works best when there is already awareness in the system that all is not well and that change is needed. The greater the awareness, or the closer the system to a crisis point, then the greater the motivation to change is likely to be. In this particular research it was not so much the case that all was not well with the system but rather that it was uncertain how healthy the deployed system actually was.

Taylor proposes that a type of action research is a useful operational model for systems consultancy in schools, stating that:

“..it provides a framework to contain and a structure to guide the complex developments that are likely to emerge on a variety of fronts once a consultation has got underway”. (Taylor, 1994:138). This approach to action research is derived from Lewin, cited in Taylor, and consists of:

“..repeated cycles of a progression of steps:

Formulation of a problem or question;

Fact-finding analysis of data;

Feedback of findings and discussion of implications;

Planning;

Implementation of action;

Evaluation". (Taylor, 1994:138) It is possible for the cycle to stop before it has run the whole course, or the evaluation stage may lead to further questions and the repetition of part or all of the cycle. An adaptation of this cycle was employed in this research in that the cycle did not run the whole course but focused on the stages of planning (determining the elements of the case study that will support the answering of the research question); action (the elements of interview and observation), and fact finding (analysis of data gathered from the field work).

In this research I have undertaken interviews with consultees and consultants as an information-gathering stage of the case study. The value of interviews as a way of gaining participants' ideas, views and perceptions is well-established in research methodology. In this research interviews were conducted with the two main groups of professionals who engage in the process of consultation i.e. Advisory Teachers from SEN support services who engage in the process as the consultant, and SENCOs from mainstream schools who engage in the process as consultees.

The case study field work was carried out in two schools; one in a school that had experienced positive outcomes from the consultation process and perceived that this process met their needs and supported them in meeting the needs of their most vulnerable pupils, and one in a school where I was aware, through local knowledge, they perceived they had not experienced positive outcomes and consequently felt either unsupported or under-supported.

3.7 The purpose of the interviews

As previously stated, the value of interviews as a way of gaining participants' ideas, views and perceptions is well-established in research methodology (Thomas, 2009). This research involved interviews conducted with the main two groups of professionals who engage in the process of consultation i.e. Advisory Teachers from SEN support services who engage in the process as the consultant, and SENCOs from mainstream schools who engage in the process as consultees.

The purpose of the interviews was to investigate with both consultees and consultants a range of issues including;

- the format of the consultation process
- how the request for consultation is initiated and processed
- whether and how the expectations of both parties i.e. consultant and consultee, are clarified and shared
- how the expected or desired outcomes are agreed
- whether the outcomes of the consultation are evaluated
- whether satisfaction with both the process and the outcome are sought
- whether dissatisfaction with the process is followed up and, if so, how
- whether evaluation of the consultation takes place to determine impact on pupil progress

3.8 Interviews with Consultees to seek their experiences of the consultation process

I was of the opinion that the views of consultees engaged in the consultation process would be an important starting-point in the information gathering process. Six SENCOs from mainstream schools who engage with central SEN support services through the process of consultation were therefore interviewed. The philosophy of process consultation is that the person who 'owns' the problem should engage in the process as consultee, and in many instances in schools the consultee would therefore be expected to be the class teacher. However, in practice in this particular context, consultation takes place most often with the SENCO in the role of consultee. This is partly due to time constraints and partly due to SENCOs wanting to maintain the key role in the process in the school. It could also be linked to a lack of training. If SENCOs had not received training themselves then how could they have cascaded this 'non-training' to class teachers? Therefore, when schools were contacted and invited to participate in the research from the perspective of the consultee, all schools nominated the SENCO as the most appropriate person to be interviewed.

In later discussion with these SENCOs, discussions that were not part of the formal interviews, it became evident that all six schools contacted had not considered the possibility that a class teacher may have been the most appropriate member of staff to be interviewed as consultee. This highlights both the practice of consultation in the schools, i.e. that the SENCO is the person who engages on

behalf of the school, and also the philosophy of these schools re SEN, i.e. that the responsibility for SEN sits first and foremost with the SENCO.

The schools who engage with Advisory Teachers via consultation and who were asked to participate in the research interviews were not chosen by me for any reason other than the fact that they engage in the process of consultation, and had SENCOs in post who had been actively engaged in the process for a minimum time period of one year. The SENCOs who were interviewed, who will be referred to as consultees for the purposes of the research, were representative of both primary and secondary schools and were a mix of male and female staff. All of the consultees interviewed were experienced in working via process consultation, having worked in this delivery method for a minimum period of one year.

3.9 The interview procedure for consultees

Six SENCOs who engage in the process of consultation in the role of consultee were interviewed. All six had been participating in the process for a minimum period of one year. Once the schools had agreed to participate in the research I contacted all the SENCOs individually, by telephone, and confirmed that they were willing to be interviewed. All six agreed, although two appeared a little wary and wanted clarification that their schools had not been approached because of any concerns raised about their involvement in the process. During this initial contact I outlined and explained how the interview would be conducted.

The SENCOs were informed that during the interview they would be asked twelve pre-scripted questions about the consultation process. They were told that these

would be open questions requiring thoughtful, personal and detailed responses, rather than closed questions that may only have required a limited multiple-choice response or a graded response. In the same manner as would later take place for consultants, supplementary questions would be asked by the interviewer if deemed appropriate, in order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the views of the consultant. The interviews would therefore be similar to the 'focused interview' as described by Cohen and Manion (1985), who refer to instances in which the interviewer regards certain aspects of a situation as interesting based on other elements of their research and their literature review. The structure of the interview is therefore not rigidly set but has the flexibility to be shaped by the responses of the interviewee. Their responses would be handwritten by me during the interview and transcribed afterwards. I assured them that their responses would be confidential to the research and that they would not be identified. I informed them that they would be recorded as 'Consultee 1, 2, 3' etc but not identified by name or school.

I took the decision not to use a tape recorder or dictaphone during the interviews for reasons of openness and trust. I had spoken to all the consultees prior to interviewing them, and when describing the proposed process to the first two consultees I asked them if they would prefer the interview to be tape recorded or manually recorded. Both consultees immediately said that they preferred notes to be taken rather than a dictaphone being used. I took the decision then not to ask the preference of the other consultees but to proceed by taking handwritten notes. It appeared to me by the reaction of the first two SENCOs that they were going to be more comfortable and relaxed if the interview were not being tape recorded. It

appeared that this would make them feel more confident about the conduct and confidentiality of the interview and I wanted them to feel at ease during the interview in order to get the most accurate, open and honest answers to the questions possible.

The interviews, therefore, were not taped but were recorded in as much detail as possible during the interview. Each interview was structured around a set of twelve questions (Appendix 1) with supplementary questions being asked if appropriate. These supplementary questions were not scripted but allowed the flexibility of prompting further information from the consultees if required. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour and fifteen minutes, but the majority were close to the thirty minute guideline. Two interviews were much longer than the others at one hour and fifteen minutes and fifty five minutes respectively, and that was because two SENCOs talked at length about individual pupils, even though this was not the purpose of the interview. I attempted to bring them back to the interview questions as quickly and politely as possible but I was not a successful in this as I would have liked. Individual pupil information was not part of the interview process and I did not write down or make notes of any information relating to individual pupils. Each consultee decided on the date, time and location of the interview to suit their own working pattern and preference. All six interviews took place at the end of the school day. All took place at the consultees' schools, at their request, and all interviews were conducted and completed over a ten week period.

I took the decision to interview the consultees first, ahead of the consultants, in order to reduce the possibility of any bias on my part. I was continually alert to the possibility of bias whilst conducting the research, and I was aware that I may, unconsciously rather than consciously, attempt to influence the views of the consultees so that they were in accordance with the views of the consultants. This could have occurred by tone of voice, intonation, or facial expression whilst I was asking the scripted questions and, although I thought it highly unlikely on my part due to the fact that I was alert to the possibility, I wanted to do my utmost to minimise any such possibility.

Following transcription of the interviews all consultees were sent a typed copy and given the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy. They were asked to contact me by phone or email within four weeks if they wished to suggest any changes. Three consultees contacted me to say that the transcripts were accurate records of the interviews. I did not receive any feedback from the other three consultees and so the interview transcripts were able to be regarded as accurate records of the individual interviews.

At all points of their involvement it was implicit that the SENCOs had the option to remove themselves from the research at any time. This was the same for Advisory Teachers. I was never asked by any of the SENCOs (or Advisory Teachers) if they could withdraw if they wanted to, but we engaged in a number of conversations or contacts where the research was described; where their agreement was sought; where their questions were answered and where I expressed my appreciation for them agreeing to be involved. Also, they received a copy of their transcripts to

check for accuracy, and so it was implicit on a number of occasions and levels that their involvement was voluntary and as such that implied that they could withdraw at any time.

3.10 Key Questions for consultees

The key questions (Appendix 1) asked during the interviews with consultees were as follows:

1. How was the process of consultation described or explained to you?
2. What did you have to do to initiate the process?
3. Did you have to provide any information prior to the start of the consultation and, if so, what?
4. How was parental permission gained?
5. Was pupil's permission gained? If not, why?
6. Were you able to state your expectations of the process?
7. Were outcomes clarified and agreed?
8. At the end of the consultation, were you satisfied with the process? If not, why?
9. Were you satisfied with the outcome (product) of the consultation? If not, why?
10. Was any dissatisfaction followed up? If so, how?
11. What impact has the consultation had on pupil outcomes? How do you know?
12. How would you describe your role in the consultation process? (e.g. partner, patient)

3.11 Consultee post-interview analysis

Immediately after the interview I transcribed my handwritten notes as accurately as possible. This was obviously not 100% accurate as a taped interview would be but was carried out in this manner for the reasons stated previously.

Constant comparison, theoretical sampling and negative case analysis were used to improve the validity (Robson, 2002). The raw interview transcripts were examined critically in the light of the literature review and then scrutinised further with the aim of establishing interconnections between them using a version of cognitive mapping as developed by Jones (1985) who described cognitive mapping as:

“...a method of modelling persons’ beliefs in diagrammatic form...A cognitive map comprises two main elements: persons’ concepts or ideas in the form of descriptions of entities, abstract or concrete, in the situation being considered; and beliefs or theories about the relationships between them, shown in the map by an arrow or simple line” (Jones, 1985: 266).

Following transcription all the interviews were edited. By this I mean that information or comments relating to situations other than the consultation process were removed from the transcript. Some SENCOs talked at some length about particular pupils and this was not part of the interview process and was not appropriate for inclusion for reasons of confidentiality and ethics, as the pupils’ permission had not been sought. I advised SENCOs of this in the interview, but it was necessary to edit the transcriptions thoroughly to ensure that they contained no references to any situation that was not related to the consultation process.

Key words or phrases in each of the consultants' and consultees' responses were then highlighted. They were then examined and grouped together until a set of diagrams was created that clarified the key ideas proposed during the interviews. These then formed the foundations for the development of the concept mapping process, the results of which can be found in 4.1.

3.12 Interviews with Consultants to seek their experiences of the consultation process

The views of consultants engaged in the consultation process are of equal importance to the information gathering process as those of consultees. Six Advisory Teachers from a central SEN support service which engages with schools through the process of consultation were therefore interviewed.

Six Advisory Teachers who engage in the process of consultation in the role of consultant were interviewed. All six had been participating in the process for a minimum period of two years and all six supported in the schools where the six SENCOs who were interviewed re their role as consultee worked. This meant that the Advisory Teacher and SENCO responses – or consultant and consultee responses – could be paired for purposes of comparison, thus enabling me to analyse the views and perceptions of both parties who had been engaged in the same consultation.

The Advisory Teachers who engage with schools via consultation, hereafter referred to as the 'consultants', were not chosen by me for any reason other than the fact that they engage as consultants with schools in the process of

consultation. They were convenience samples in that they were all employed in my local authority and were readily available and also, perhaps more importantly, willing to engage in research that would potentially have a direct impact on their way of working. The process for selection was simple and straightforward.

At the time of the interviews there were twelve Advisory Teachers employed in the central SEN support service and all were invited to nominate themselves to participate in the research. They were informed of the research during a team meeting and told that I was asking for six volunteers. This method of using the team meeting for information-sharing was selected not as a means of using a power-influence but rather the opposite, as a means of openness and transparency. I could have written or emailed all the Advisory Teachers, outlining the research and asking them to contact me if they were willing to participate. However, as the team had a very strong bond and worked in a very collaborative manner, I felt it was more in keeping with the team ethos to raise the possibility of participating in the research at a team meeting. This meant, in common with all major team developments, that all team members heard the same information at the same time; had the opportunity to ask questions together; to all hear the same answers, and to feel that they all an equal right to decide to participate or otherwise.

Although the initial discussion about participation in the research took place at a team meeting, it was not minuted and all staff were aware of this. This decision was made, and explained, because it was not going to be followed up as 'matters arising' in the following meeting. The Advisory Teachers were informed about the

research, informed about the interview process and the confidentiality attached to the interviews, but told that they were not expected to make a decision re their participation at the meeting. Their decision to participate, or not, would be confidential to them. Once any questions had been asked and answered, they were asked to consider their involvement and then to contact me individually, within two weeks, either by email or hand-written note, if they were willing to participate. I gave them my assurance that this was their choice, that I was asking them as a researcher and not as their manager, and that I would not be asking them again, so they should therefore not feel that were under any pressure to become involved. I also informed them that I would not be sharing the information with anyone in terms of who elected to participate, and that they were under no pressure to share that information either; they obviously could if they wished, but that would be their choice.

Within five days I had received a mixture of emails and hand-written notes from eight of the Advisory Teachers stating that they were willing to participate in the research. As six of these eight supported in the schools where SENCOs had agreed to be interviewed, I knew that I then had my sample. I then emailed all twelve Advisory Teachers to say that I had received eight offers of participation, not stating who they were from for obvious reasons of confidentiality, and thanking them for giving the research their consideration. They were also informed in the email that no further volunteers were needed, and thanked for their co-operation. In addition to this email I also sent a separate email to the two Advisory Teachers who had volunteered to participate but who had not, at this point been selected due to my receiving more volunteers than were needed. I explained the situation to

them, thanking them for their support and stating that I may approach them again during the course of the research if that became necessary. I asked them to contact me directly if they had any questions or comments. Both emailed me by return, separately, stating that they were pleased that sufficient volunteers had come forward and that they would be happy to support the research in the future if required.

All of the six Advisory Teachers volunteers who were selected to participate had attended the same initial training in process consultation, and had also participated in on-going professional development in the area. The initial training had consisted of two days of training in their own authority delivered by the Principal Educational Psychologist of a Local Authority in a London Borough whose own service had been engaging in support with schools via consultation for a number of years. All of them were in favour of consultation but were also familiar with the referral method of service delivery. They were all therefore working within the system of consultation but had knowledge and experience of referral systems. Their professional experience of more than one system of service delivery had led them to being pro-consultation, but they were most definitely not evangelists for the system of consultation. They were not trying to promote an agenda of their own in any way. It was made clear to them that by participating in the research they would have the opportunity to give their own feedback on the system that was in operation and that they were free to express their views, whether positive or negative. My personal knowledge of them as advisory professionals gave me confidence that they would give unbiased opinions and be critical where they deemed it necessary.

All the consultants interviewed were female, but this was unavoidable as, over the course of the research, all the Advisory Teachers employed by the central support service were female. All of the consultants interviewed were experienced in working via process consultation, having worked in this delivery method for periods of time ranging from two to nine years.

3.13 The interview procedure for consultants

Six Advisory Teachers who engage in the process of consultation in the role of consultant were interviewed. As has been stated previously, all six had received training in the process and had a number of years of practical experience ranging from two to nine. All Advisory Teachers were contacted individually, either in person or by email, to confirm that were willing to be interviewed as part of the research. All six readily confirmed their agreement. During this confirmation, whether face to face discussion or email contact, I again outlined and explained how the interview would be conducted. The consultants were informed that the interview would be semi-structured in that they would be asked twelve pre-scripted questions about the consultation process. They were told that these would be open questions requiring thoughtful and detailed responses, rather than closed questions that may only have required a limited multiple-choice response or a graded response.

Supplementary questions would be asked by the interviewer, if deemed appropriate, in order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the views of the consultant. The interviews would therefore be similar to the 'focused interview' as described by Cohen and Manion (1985), and the 'semi-structured interview'

described by Thomas (2009). Cohen and Manion (1985) refer to instances in which the interviewer regards certain aspects of a situation as interesting based on other elements of their research and their literature review. The structure of the interview is therefore not rigidly set but has the flexibility to be shaped by the responses of the interviewee. Thomas (2009) refers to the combination of structure in terms of issues to be covered coupled with the flexibility of being able to ask additional questions as necessary. Semi-structured interviews were used so that I could respond flexibly to issues raised by the participants and probe for clarification of meanings.

The consultants were informed that their responses would be handwritten by me during the interview and transcribed afterwards. I assured them that their responses would be confidential to the research and that they would not be identified in any way during the course of the research. I informed them that they would be recorded as 'Consultant 1, 2, 3' etc but not identified by name or service. The interviews were not going to be taped but their responses were to be handwritten in as much detail as possible during the interview. I took the decision not to use a tape recorder or dictaphone during the interviews for reasons of consistency, as the decision had already been made not to tape record the interviews with the consultees.

Each interview was structured around a set of twelve questions (Appendix 2), with supplementary questions being asked if appropriate. These supplementary questions were not scripted but allowed the flexibility of prompting further information from the consultants if required. All consultants were advised that the

anticipated length of time for the interview was thirty minutes. In practice the interviews ranged from twenty five minutes to one hour and ten minutes, but the majority were close to the thirty minute guideline. Each consultant decided on the date, time and location of the interview to suit their own working pattern and preference. The majority, four out of six, took place at the end of the working day. One took place during lunch time and one took place first thing, prior to the start of the working day. All took place at the consultants' office location, in a private room, and all interviews were conducted and completed over a five week period.

Following transcription of the interviews all consultants were sent a typed copy and given the opportunity to check the transcript for accuracy. They were asked to contact me by in person or by email within four weeks if they wished to suggest any changes. None of the consultants contacted me and so the interview transcripts were able to be regarded as accurate records of the individual interviews. I did not at any point state that the Advisory Teachers could withdraw from the research, but this was implicit for the reasons previously described for the SENCOs in 3.7.

3.14 Key Questions for consultants

The key questions asked during the interviews with the consultants were as follows:

1. How do you describe the consultation process to consultees to ensure their understanding?
2. How do consultees initiate the process?

3. Are there any requirements prior to the commencement of the consultation?
E.g. progress data, gathering of pupil's views
4. How do you gain parental permission?
5. Is the pupil's permission sought? If not, why not?
6. How do you clarify the consultee's expectations of the process?
7. Are outcomes clarified and agreed? If so, how?
8. At the end of the consultation, is satisfaction with the process determined?
If so, how?
9. Is satisfaction with the outcome (product) determined? If so, how?
10. Is dissatisfaction followed up? If so, how?
11. What impact has the consultation process had on pupil outcomes? How do you know?
12. How would you describe the consultee's role in the process? (e.g. partner, patient)

3.15 Consultant post-interview analysis

Immediately after the interview I transcribed my handwritten notes as accurately as possible. This was obviously not 100% accurate as a taped interview would be but was carried out in this manner for the reasons stated earlier. The process of cognitive mapping as described earlier in section 3.10 was then repeated for the consultants' interviews.

3.16 Collation, analysis and evaluation of interview data

As previously stated, constant comparison, sometimes called the constant comparative method, was selected as the method to be employed for analysis of the interviews with both consultees and consultants. This is a method described as:

“..the basic analytic method of the interpretative researcher” (Thomas, 2009:198).

Constant comparative is a systematic, qualitative research methodology emphasising the generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research. Constant comparative is also called grounded theory, and is a research methodology that operates almost in the reverse fashion from traditional research.

The first step in this method is the data collection, and this can be through a variety of methods but in this instance from the interviews. From the data collected, key points are marked using a series of codes, which are extracted from the text. The codes are then grouped into similar concepts. From the concepts, categories are formed which are the basis for the creation of a theory, or a reverse generated hypothesis.

The basic four stages of analysis as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) are codes; concepts; categories and theory. Codes identify the anchors that allow key points of data to be gathered and concepts are collections of codes of similar content that allow the data to be grouped. Categories are broad groups of similar concepts that can be used to generate a theory, and the theory stage refers to a collection of explanations that explain the subject of the research. According to Glaser and Strauss the method is not limited to the realm of qualitative research,

or qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data analysis is devoted to descriptive accuracy while Glaser and Strauss's method emphasises conceptualisation that is abstract of time, place and people.

A goal of constant comparative or grounded theory is to discover the participant's main concern and how they are trying to resolve it. The questions continually asked are 'What is going on?' and 'What is the main problem for the participants?' It aims to conceptualise what is going on by using empirical data. It should generate concepts that explain people's actions regardless of time and place. It can be viewed as a general method and not just a qualitative method.

The results of grounded theory are not normally reporting statistically significant probabilities but a set of probability statements about the relationship between concepts (Glaser, 1998). Validity in the traditional sense is therefore not an issue in Grounded Theory which instead is judged by fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1998). It is dealing with conceptual level data.

Attribution theory, the central aim of which is to observe and study people's perceptions about the causes of social events, also has a role to play in the analysis and evaluation of the data gathered. Deaux and Wrightsman (1988) state that attitudes may be dispositional (ie personal) or situational, and investigating what participants – both consultees and consultants – attribute to themselves and why will be central to the analysis of the data. The implementation of the consultation model and its' success or failure will be attributed by either party to either impersonal factors or to personal factors. So attribution theory can provide a

framework for the interpretation and analysis of the behaviour of the participants in the process. Individuals may attribute problems to the consultee or the consultant and to their dispositions based on the intentions it has been assumed they have. Other elements of the consultation process may be attributed by participants to contextual problems, and the success or failure of consultation will be largely dependent on these inferences.

Advisory Teachers and SENCOs, although both teachers in terms of their initial training, may have little in common with each other ideologically. Their ideologies may be very different. It could therefore be easy for the SENCO to blame the Advisory Teacher, and thus the consultation process, or vice versa, if the pupil in question does not make the expected progress.

3.17 Concept Maps

The data gathered from the interviews with consultees and consultants was analysed and key information transferred to concept maps. The interviews provided a vast amount of information which then needed to be analysed in a method that was both efficient and constructive. Concept maps met the criteria for the analysis. A concept map is, in its simplest form, a diagram showing the relationship amongst concepts. It can be described as a graphical tool for organising and representing knowledge. A concept map is a way of representing relationships between a set of connected concepts and ideas. They help the researcher to reflect on what they know and on what they do not know and are a way to develop logical thinking by revealing connections that may otherwise not have been identified. Concept maps were originally developed to support learning

in the sciences. They are similar to topic maps in that they both connect concepts or topics, but are in contrast to mind maps which are often restricted to 'spider' or 'tree' structures. Concept maps tend to be more free form.

The technique of concept mapping was developed in the 1970's by Novak as a means of supporting students' learning. Novak's work is based on the cognitive theories of Ausubel, who stressed the importance of prior knowledge in being able to learn new concepts. There have been numerous attempts to conceptualise the process of producing concept maps and McAleese (1998) suggested that it is a process of off-loading, and that by identifying nodes or relationships individuals become aware of what they know and, as a result, are able to modify what they know. Concept mapping can also be seen as a first step in ontology-building, and can also be a flexible way of representing formal argument.

For this research a simple adaptation of construct mapping was used. I did not have a single focus question as described by Novak, but was instead looking at the responses given to all of the questions used in the semi-structured interviews (3.9; 3.13). The constructs drawn out through utilising the constant comparative method were identified and the material was coded for meaning under an appropriate range of broad, inclusive codes or headings such as 'philosophy', 'outcomes', 'impact on pupils', 'interpersonal' and 'organisation' which reflected the emerging themes. The coding process helps to compare and measure the level of commonality in the responses, as well as allowing comparisons to be made (Thomas, 2009). The maps were re-worked a number of times; adding, subtracting and changing as determined by the on-going analysis of the data. Arrowed lines

were added to link ideas, to help create meaning and to show interrelationships as appropriate. The personal nature of the consultants and consultees own construct systems were then discussed, taking into account this analysis. As stated, the concepts were connected to other concepts by arrows, generating a network, key statements having been summarised and boxed for clarity. Negative statements have been shown in shaded boxes.

3.18 Design of the case study

The research question is pivotal to the research and drives the direction of the activities that will then need to be undertaken in order for it to be answered. Thomas (2009:27) states:

“Research begins with a purpose and a question, not a research design.”

My research question was refined as follows, as a result of the literature review:

What are the characteristics of an effective consultation system for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teachers support to schools, and what are the characteristics of an ineffective consultation system?

This question is both situational - investigating and describing what is happening during the process of consultation – and descriptive, trying to understand what is happening in that process. The design of the case study therefore needed to be constructed to enable the research question to be answered. This meant that the design of the case study needed to include a range of different methods for gathering and analysing the relevant data. The case study, being by its nature multi-faceted, involved a number of elements, the key ones being interviews and observations.

The case study, as the vehicle for my research methodology, involved looking in great detail, depth and from all angles at how the process of consultation operated in two schools. In my research I used a combination of interpretivist theoretical perspective and objectivist theoretical perspective (Wilson, 2009.) A case study was undertaken in order to be able to explore consultation as a complete process, rather than a process broken down into its constituent parts. Case studies are a source of rich, deep enquiry. They may involve observation, exploration of data and asking question after question to try and analyse and, ultimately, understand the minute details of a system or process. They are similar in nature, though far more rigorous and detailed, to the currently-favoured 360° review process in leadership and management which involves questioning everyone involved in a process in order to triangulate the information to ensure that accurate and grounded results and evaluations are achieved.

Simons defines the case study as follows:

“Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic....to generate knowledge and/or inform professional practice” (2009:21).

Thomas says the case study is:

“...about understanding the *how* and *why* something might have happened or why it might be the case” (2011:4). A qualitative design was chosen for the study and

interviews and observations were identified as the most effective method for obtaining the detailed, complex data that would provide insight into the views of both consultees and consultants.

My research involved a comparative case study in two schools which were selected for the particular reason that they appeared to have significantly contrasting views and experiences of the consultation process. They were selected as a result of direct local knowledge. School 1 was selected because it was a school that had embraced the process of consultation and had openly stated that, in their experience, it was the most effective method of engaging with external SEN support services. School 2 was selected because it had, on more than one occasion, stated that it found the consultation process too time-consuming and involved, and that it would prefer a return to the previous system of referral. Also, and of particular significance, the SENCOs from these two schools had already participated in the interviews. The size of the sample takes account of the qualitative approach since observation and thematic analysis require rigorous attention to detail.

As stated, the case study observations were carried out in two schools; one in a school that had expressed positive views about the consultation process and perceived that this process met their needs and supported them in meeting the needs of their most vulnerable pupils, and one in a school that had expressed less than positive views and consequently felt either unsupported or under-supported. The SENCOs in both these schools were also involved in the interviews. The

interviews and observations of the case study will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.19 The two schools

As has been stated previously, observations were carried out in two schools which were selected as a result of local knowledge. They were schools that appeared to have significantly contrasting views and experiences of the consultation process.

School 1 was a large community primary school with just over 400 pupils on roll. An above average proportion of the pupils were known to be eligible for free school meals but the proportion of pupils with special educational needs was slightly below average, at 14%. Nearly all pupils were from White British backgrounds. Very few pupils were from minority ethnic groups or had English as an additional language. Pupils with SEN were found, by Ofsted inspection, to be making satisfactory progress but the school were found to be deploying teaching assistants ineffectively. The SENCO (consultee in the process) had been in post for four years at the time of the observations.

School 2 was a community primary school with just under two hundred pupils on roll, making it a smaller than average primary school. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs was slightly above average at 22%. Nearly all pupils were from White British backgrounds. Pupils with SEN were found, by Ofsted, to be making satisfactory progress. The SENCO had been in post for eight years at the time of the observations. It can therefore be seen that neither school had been identified by Ofsted as having significant issues in terms

of SEN provision and pupil progress; a situation that may have adversely affected their participation in and perception of the consultation process.

The observations were carried out in the schools and were focused on the consultation process. They involved the SENCO and the Advisory Teacher, both of whom had given their prior agreement to the observations. When making the arrangement the observation procedure was fully explained to both the SENCO and the Advisory Teacher, separately, in order to ensure that they were comfortable with the observation that was being arranged. Both parties stated, independently, that they were used to 'additional adults' being present either in the classroom setting or in meetings and discussions, and that they therefore would not find the situation, ie being observed, to be particularly unusual. As the focus of the observations was to be the consultation process itself, rather than the individual pupil subjects of the consultations, both parties agreed to use first name terms only in order to protect the confidentiality of the young people. Pupils were not present at any of the consultation meetings that were observed.

The observations were recorded using a Consultation Observation Proforma, which is discussed in further detail in 3.19, and the proforma was shown to the SENCOs and the Advisory Teachers prior to the observations. I felt that it was important that both parties felt as comfortable as possible and at ease whilst the observation was taking place, otherwise their behaviour and style of engagement with the process would have been affected, possibly rendering the observation inaccurate. Giving them knowledge of the proforma prior to the observations was intended to facilitate their feeling comfortable and at ease with the process.

Once a date and time for the observation had been agreed, the following procedure applied. Firstly, I ensured that I was at the school at least fifteen minutes before the scheduled start of the consultation meeting. The purpose of this was to allow time for me to get settled in the room where the consultation was to take place prior to it starting. This meant that I could, where necessary, re-arrange chairs or other furniture so that I was present in the room but as unobtrusive as possible. I did not, for example, want to sit around the table with the SENCO and the Advisory Teacher but neither did I want to delay the start of the consultation meeting by re-arranging furniture. The aim of the early arrival was two-fold. Firstly, as already stated, to be seated in the room as quietly and unobtrusively as possible, and secondly, to be present as both parties entered the room and so to be able to observe the complete consultation.

During the pre-observation meeting with the SENCO I did attempt to view the room where the consultation would take place. If this was not possible, perhaps because the SENCO could not be certain of the availability of rooms until the day of the consultation, then I tried to arrive a little bit earlier than the fifteen minutes I was allowing, but at the same time not too early as to be seen as a nuisance in the school. I tried, wherever possible, to take up a position at the side or edge of the room where the meeting was taking place, and not in direct line of sight to either party. This was, due to the small size of some of the rooms where the meetings took place, not always ideal, but it was always manageable.

3.20 Timing and Frequency of Observations

The observations were arranged to coincide with pre-existing consultation meetings between the SENCOs and the Advisory Teachers. This meant that I was able to observe 'real' consultations that had already been arranged, so neither the SENCO nor the Advisory Teacher would be engaging in anything additional or different to their scheduled appointments. The process for arranging these observations was fairly simple and straightforward. Once I had - through a combination of local knowledge gained from my own observations over time, comments from Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists over time, and comments made by SENCOs during the interviews - identified two schools with apparently differing views of consultation, I contacted the two SENCOs by telephone, outlined my research, and requested their involvement via observation. Both SENCOs agreed fairly readily, but, quite naturally, wanted further discussion prior to the observations being finalised. I then made appointments with both SENCOs separately to visit them in their schools in order to discuss the research in more detail and to secure their involvement.

During these in-school meetings I explained that, following the interviews that they had already participated in, I now wanted to observe the consultation process 'in action' and had selected them based upon their own perception of and attitude to consultation. I stressed that I would want to observe some pre-booked consultation meetings and that this would therefore not involve any additional work or preparation on their part. Both SENCOs agreed, and we were able to consult our diaries and agree two dates in each school when consultation meetings had

already been arranged with their Advisory Teacher. Observations took place in a combination of both morning and afternoon sessions. I then informed the SENCOs that I would contact the two Advisory Teachers concerned and seek their agreement to my observing the consultations. I informed the SENCOs that if the Advisory Teachers did not agree to the observations then they would have to be cancelled.

The next stage was to speak to the Advisory Teachers concerned, both of whom agreed to my observing the consultation meetings. Once again, the consultation meetings had already been agreed between the Advisory Teachers and the SENCOs and so I was able to stress that the observations would not involve any additional work or preparation on their part.

Initially, two observations were arranged in each school, i.e. two separate consultation meetings between each SENCO and their Advisory Teacher. However, after completing these observations, four in total, I felt that it would be useful to collect some additional field evidence. This was due to the fact that the data gathered did not, on preliminary analysis, appear to be providing the rich picture that I was expecting. In both schools or, more specifically, both SENCOs, there appeared to be an element of apathy and lack of drive in terms of outcomes for the consultation that I knew by experience and local knowledge was inconsistent with their usual work pattern. I did not know the reasons for this but my hypotheses included a) the fact that one of the schools was in the early stages of moving towards academy status and that this had caused a great deal of disquiet amongst the staff, including the SENCO; b) that one of the SENCOs was

undergoing the mandatory national award for SENCOs and was finding the additional work-load particularly onerous; and c) that it was close to the end of the school year and one of the SENCOs in particular had just ‘run out of steam’. Whatever the reason, I felt it prudent to the research to carry out some additional observations.

I therefore arranged a further two observations in both schools. The initial set of four observations across the two schools had taken place in the latter part of the Summer Term, and it was neither possible, nor sensible if my hypotheses had any veracity, to arrange additional observations prior to the end of the school year. The additional observations – four in total, two more in each school – were therefore arranged for the next school year and were scheduled for the first half of the Autumn Term. In one of the schools this coincided with a change of Advisory Teacher due to retirement, meaning that the observations in their entirety, i.e eight, involved two SENCOs and three Advisory Teachers. I did not anticipate that the change of Advisory Teacher would create any difficulty in terms of the research as the teacher in question had received the same initial training on consultation as the other Advisory Teachers and had also participated in the consultant interviews.

3.21 The Consultation Observation Proforma

The construction of the consultation observation proforma, (Appendix 3), was closely linked to the interview questions that had previously been completed by both consultants and consultees. I deemed it helpful in terms of consistency and efficiency to have an observation proforma to complete, but I was keenly aware

that I would also need to supplement this proforma with other relevant and pertinent data gleaned during the observation. The proforma could be described as a starting point consisting of ten standard questions that I was hoping to observe answers to, but I was also going to add to this information as appropriate. The standard questions, which were to support my observations but not to be asked, were as follows:

1. Did one person appear to chair or lead the consultation or did it appear to be a joint venture?
2. Was there evidence of prior information being shared, such as the Consultation Information Form? How was this shown?
3. Did the consultee state his/her expectations of the consultation?
4. Did the consultant ask what the consultee's expectations of the consultation were?
5. Did the consultee provide a clear picture and description of the pupil's needs?
6. What evidence, if any, was brought to the meeting? eg attainment data, handwriting sample
7. Was there evidence of solution-focused approaches being used? If so, by whom?
8. Was there evidence of Partnership or of expert/patient model? How was this shown?
9. Was there agreement on way forward/next steps/outcomes?
10. Was the meeting summarised at the end to confirm agreed actions? If so, by whom?

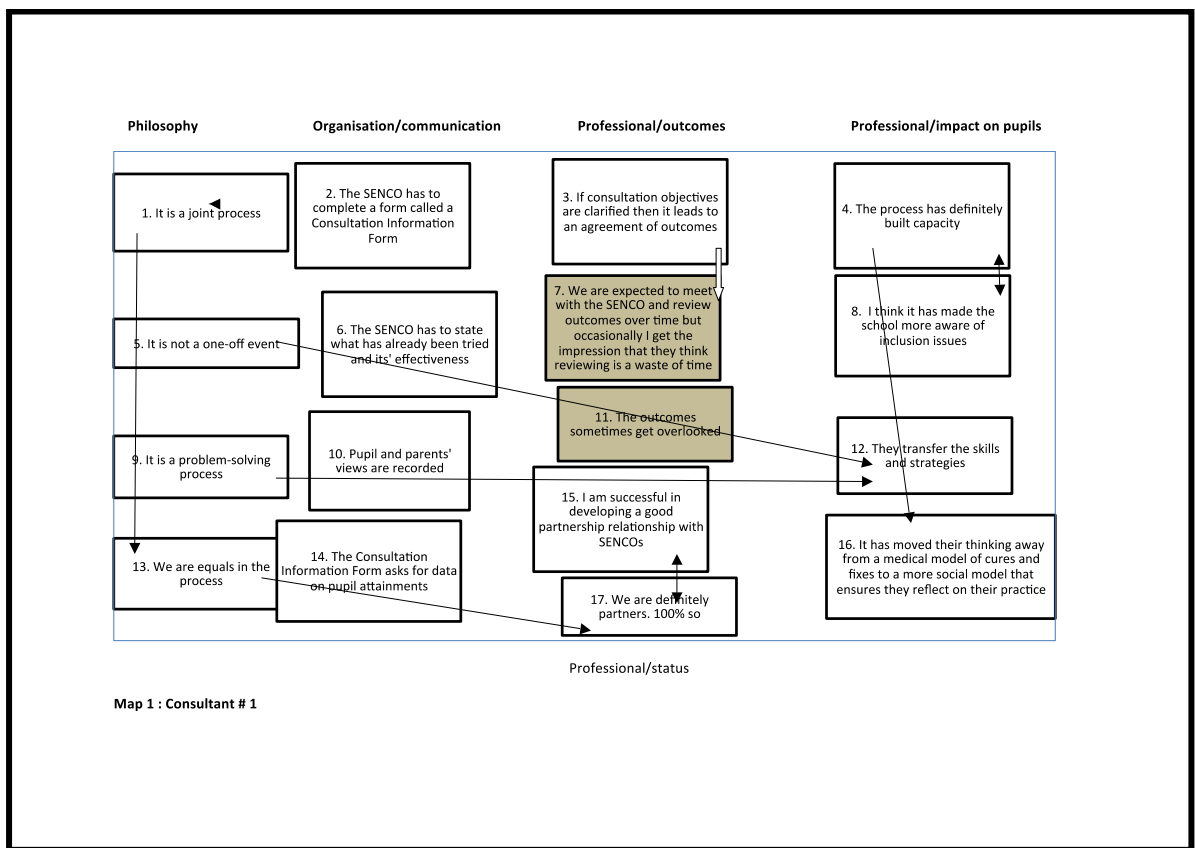
The observation proforma was shared with both SENCOs (consultees) and Advisory Teachers (consultants) at the initial meeting that I had had with them individually to seek their permission for me to observe the consultations. I felt it was important for them to have seen the observation proforma so that they would have a clear understanding of the areas I would be expecting to observe and also to alleviate any concerns they may feel about my presence as an observer, and what I was recording. I stressed that I was not expecting the questions on the proforma to drive the observations, they were purely for my use to aid consistency on my part in the conduct of the field work.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS and INTEGRATED DISCUSSION

4.1 Commentary and discussion of concept maps relating to interviews with Advisory Teachers (Consultants) and SENCOs (Consultees)

Map 1 – consultant 1

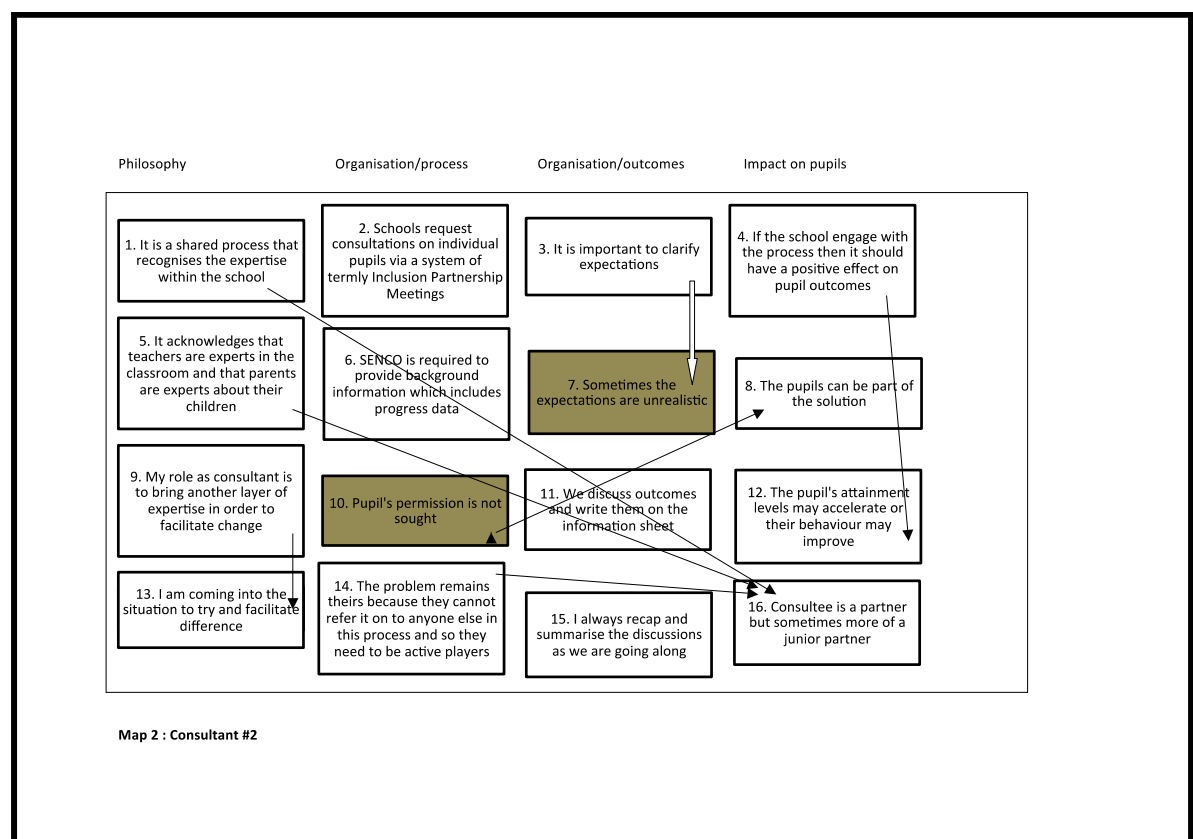


Map 1 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with over five years experience in the role of consultant in the consultation process with schools. Four themes dominate here. The roles are shaped by this Advisory Teacher by her perception of the philosophy of the consultation process and her skill in developing good relationships with SENCOs

through working in partnership in a “joint problem-solving process” (1,9). However there is a threat or a tension in the execution of the process in that she queries, despite clarifying and agreeing consultation outcomes, whether the SENCO really thinks that reviewing the consultation process is a “waste of time” (7). Roles are shaped, or transformed perhaps, for this consultant by her reports of her interpersonal manner with SENCOs or consultees in schools. She sees herself as able to develop good working relationships that model the importance of partnerships to the process, but this may mask some inadequate communication, which could be why SENCOs engage well in the early stages but then do not seem to understand the value of the review stage of the process.

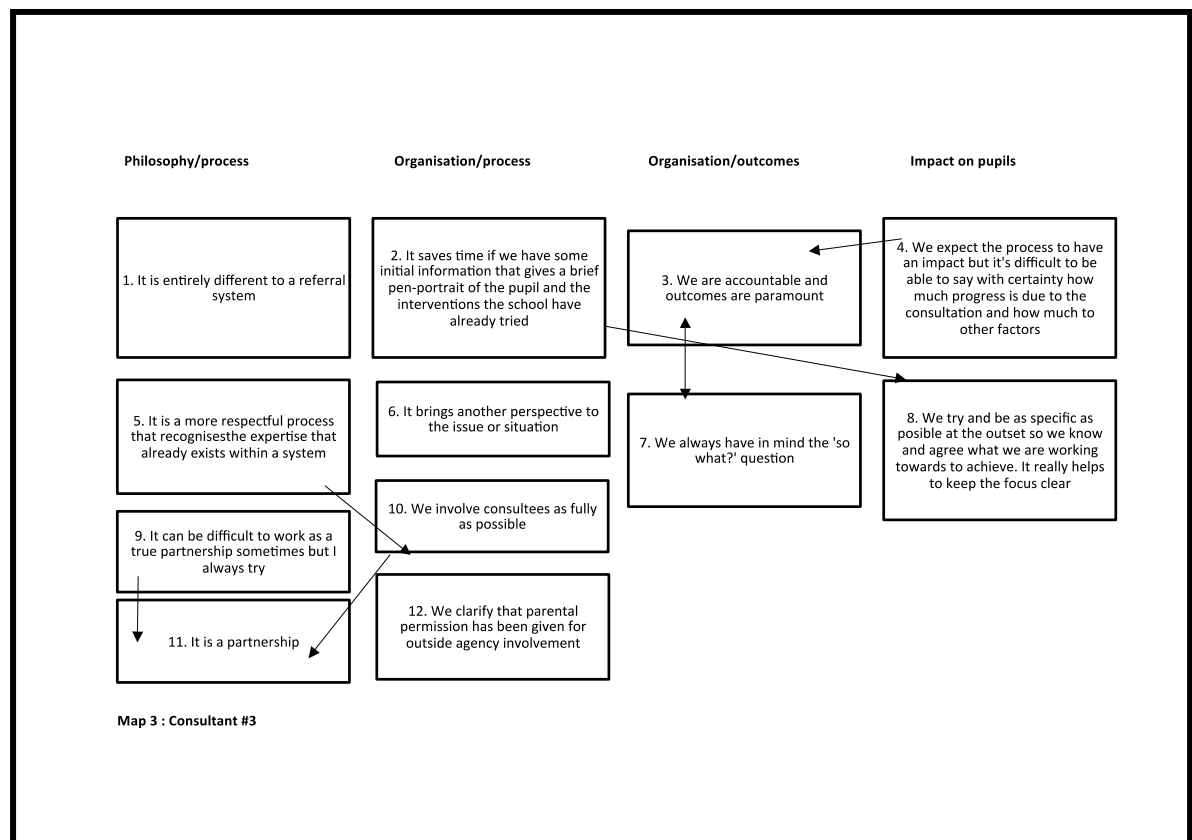
Map 2- consultant 2



Map 2 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with over five years experience in the role of consultant in the consultation process. There are clearly some significant contradictions in the responses here. This Advisory Teacher describes consultation as “a shared process that respects the expertise within the school” (1) and states that “teachers are experts in the classroom” (5), but goes on to state that the “consultee is sometimes more of a junior partner” (16). Further contradictions are expressed in terms of her view of the consultee’s expectation of the process (3, 7). In yet another contradiction we are told that “pupil’s permission is not sought” (10) although, in her opinion, “the pupils can be part of the solution” (8). There are some constructs here around status, equal status versus low status, related to the involvement of both consultees and pupils.

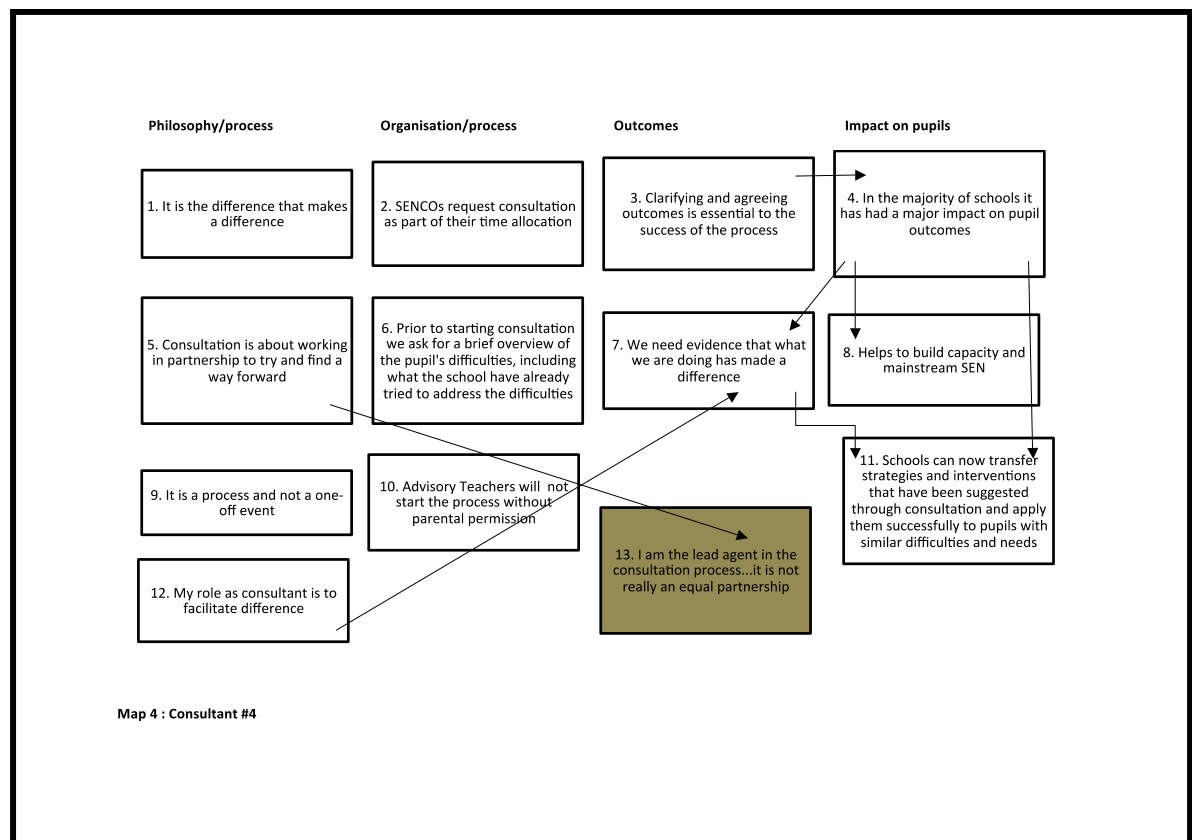
Map 3 – consultant 3



Map 3 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with more than five years experience in the role of consultant. Her construct system seems to hinge on the perception of the professional position of others. Through her comments she acknowledges that consultation is a “respectful process that recognises the expertise that already exists within a system” (5), that “we involve consultees as fully as possible” (10) and that “it is a partnership” (11). However, she then goes on to quantify the latter statement (9). She is clear about the focus of her role on outcomes and accountability, talking about ‘so what?’ question (7), by which she means that all actions have to be able to be answered in the sense of ‘has this made a difference?’ or, ‘I’ve done this, so what? What impact has it had?’

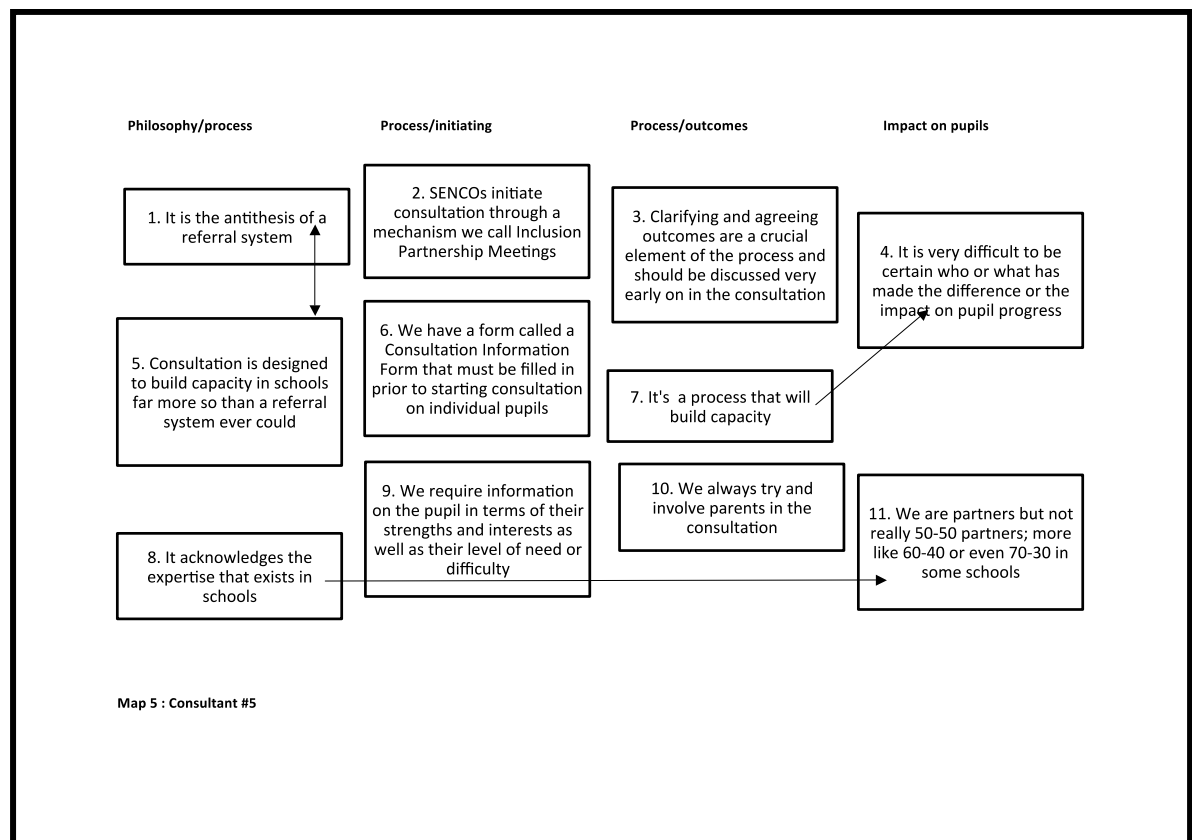
Map 4 – consultant 4



Map 4 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with less than five years experience in the role of consultant. Her construct system appears to hinge largely on communication. She describes her role as “to facilitate difference” (12). She expresses the view that she “needs evidence that what we’re doing has made a difference” (7) but goes on to observe that “in the majority of schools it has had a major impact on pupil outcomes” (4). She does contradict herself, stating that “consultation is about working in partnership” (5) but also stating that “I am the lead agent – it is not really an equal partnership” (13).

Map 5 – consultant 5

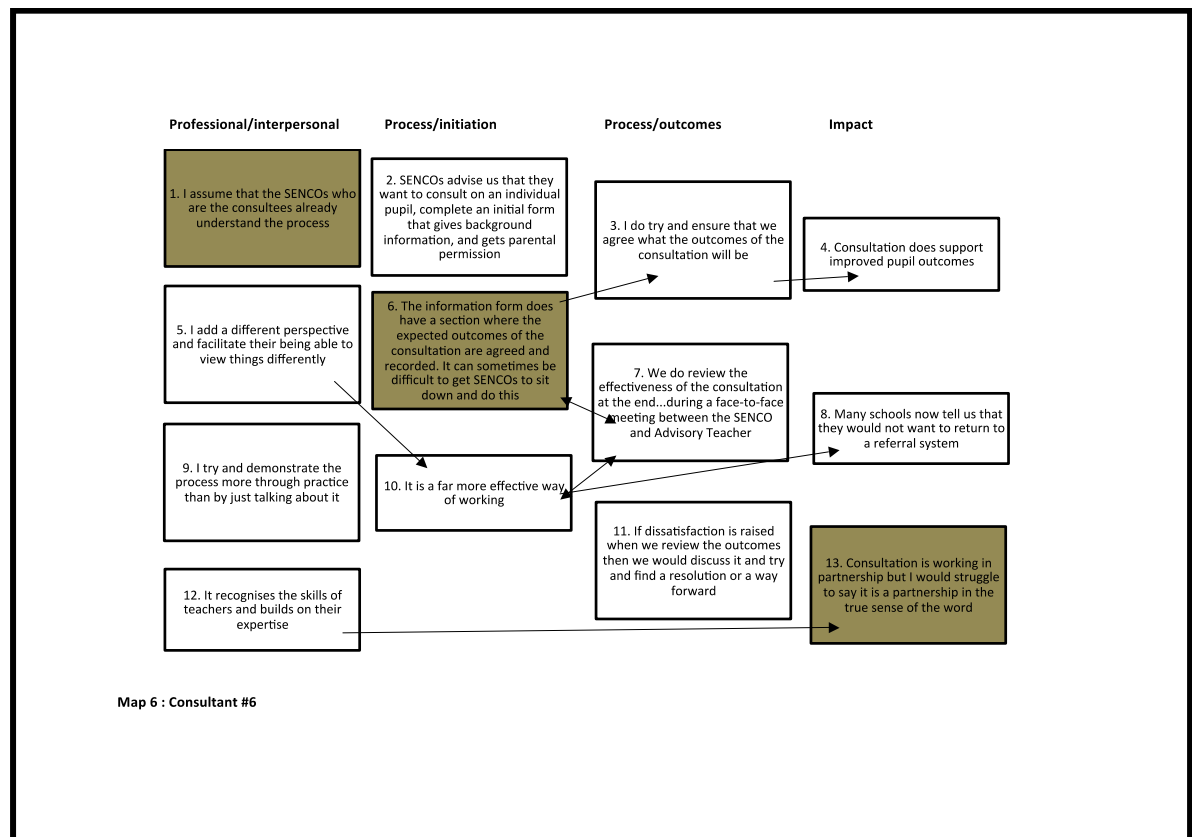


Map 5 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with more than five years experience in the role of consultant. As with the previous Advisory Teacher, communication again appears to be the overarching representation, with a number of quite explicit contradictions that suggest a possible lack of belief or confidence in the process of consultation. Initial answers were clear, stating that consultation is “the antithesis of a referral system” (1) and one that is “designed to build capacity in schools far more than a referral system ever could” (5). This is re-stated later (7) and this re-statement would suggest conviction if it were not accompanied by the statement “It is very difficult to be certain who or what has made the difference or the impact on pupil

progress” (4). Further contradiction in communication and partnership roles is evident in her other statements (8, 11).

Map 6 – consultant 6

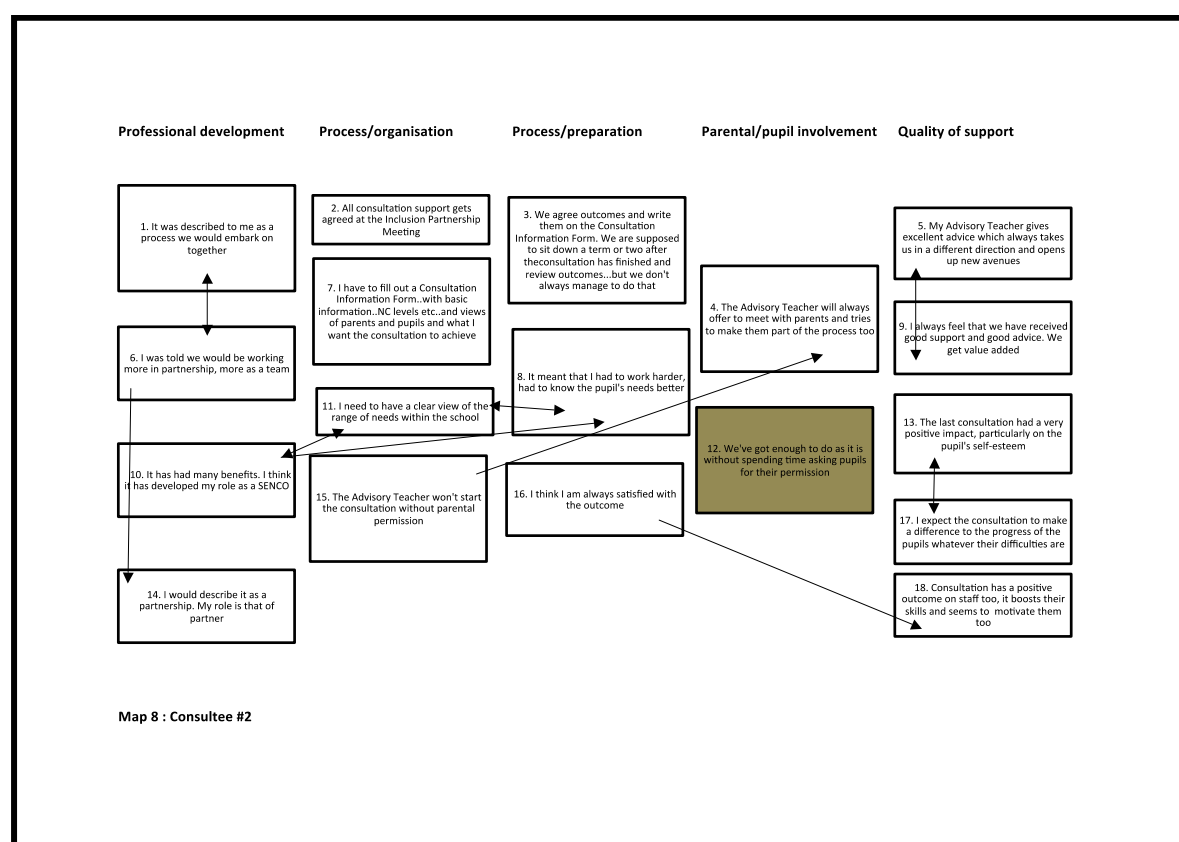


Map 6 – commentary and discussion

An Advisory Teacher with more than five years experience in the role of consultant. Organisational concerns seem to shape her construct system, linked to interpersonal communication. This Advisory Teachers confidently, or perhaps overconfidently, assumes that SENCOs understand the process of consultation but she does say “I try and demonstrate the process more through practice than by just talking about it” (9). Contradictions are apparent from the comments she makes about consultation being a process that recognises the skills of teachers

interpersonal relationships seem to shape her construct system, linked to feelings of being part of the system and belonging to it. This is evidenced in a significant number of comments including boxes 3,14,10 and 5, but perhaps most notably when stating, “I do feel comfortable about my role in the process” (13). However, this consultee also appears to have adopted a very passive role in the process as can be seen from the number of comments that begin with ‘I am issued...’; ‘I suppose I am...’; ‘I was told...’, and ‘I am asked...’ (2,3,5,7,14). The responses from this consultee lack any sense of dynamism and could be suggestive of a consultee who is engaging in the process whilst still mentally working in a referral system and viewing the consultant as the ‘expert’ rather than as a partner.

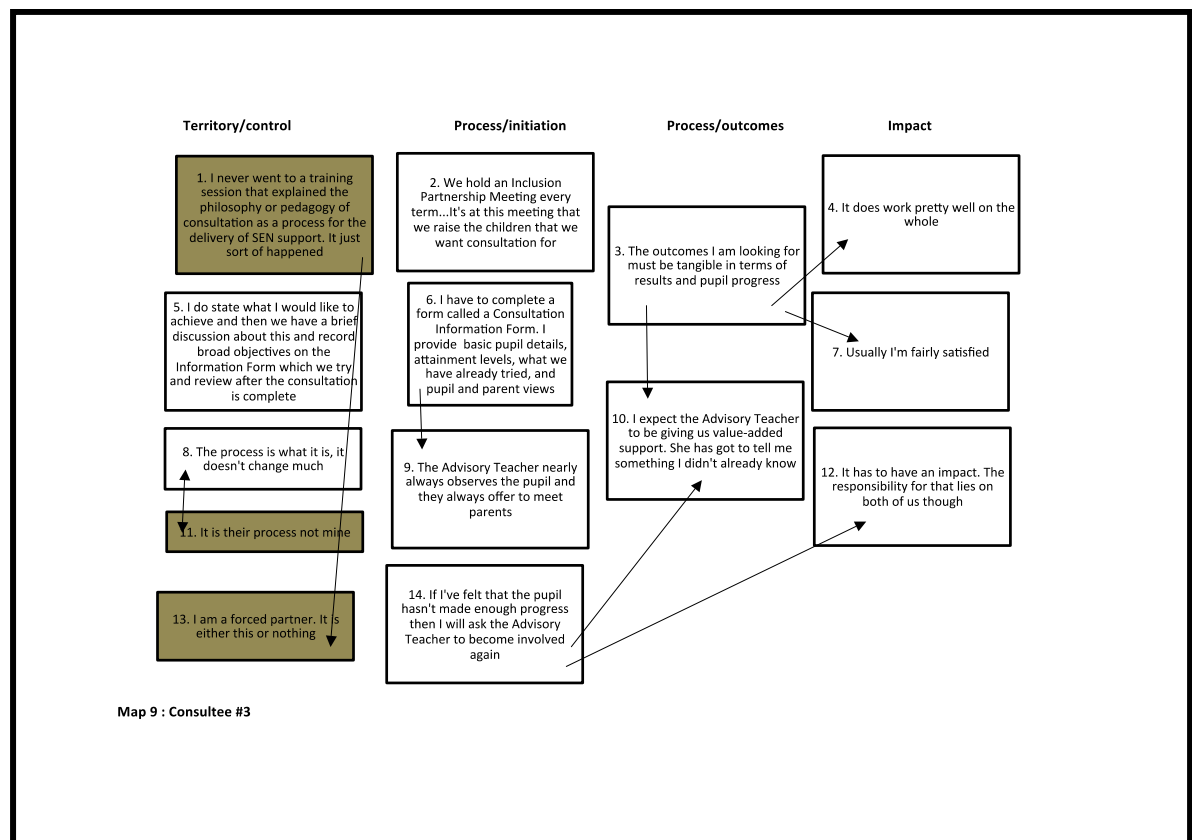
Map 8 – consultee 2



Map 8 – commentary and discussion

This involves a SENCO with less than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. Most of her construct system revolves around the notion of quality, whether focusing on the quality of support received from the consultant (9, 5) or the quality of the outcomes of the consultation process itself (13, 16, 17). She is the only consultee to explicitly refer to the wider benefits of consultation, stating “Consultation has a positive outcome on staff too, it boosts their skills and seems to motivate them too” (18). Communication appears to be a secondary process and the emphasis is dispositional rather than situational. There is something of a contradiction to this in 1, 2 and 5 however, where the success of the process is seen to depend on the communication and on a set of skills for working effectively.

Map 9 – consultee 3

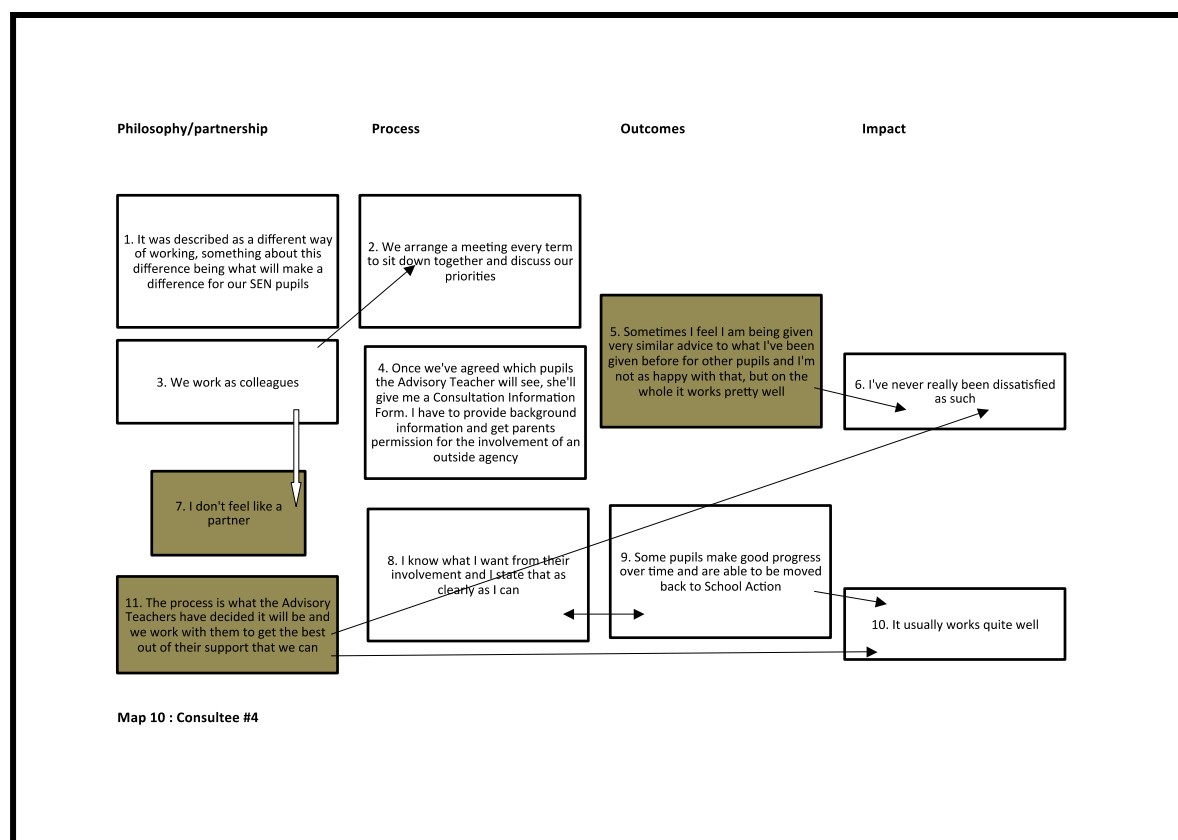


Map 9 – commentary and discussion

A SENCO with more than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. This SENCO has considerable prior experience - more than five years – of working in a referral system. The crux of her construct system seems to focus on the perceptions of territory and control (1, 8,11,13) and the professional ability of the Advisory Teacher, linked explicitly to outcomes (3,10). The negative construct around territory (8, 11, 13) contrasts very strongly with the views expressed about impact (4,7,11). There is further contradiction expressed in the fact that she insists that the Advisory Teacher “..has got to tell me something I didn’t already know” (10), whilst also stating “If I’ve felt that the pupil hasn’t made

enough progress then...I will ask the Advisory Teacher to become involved again” (14).

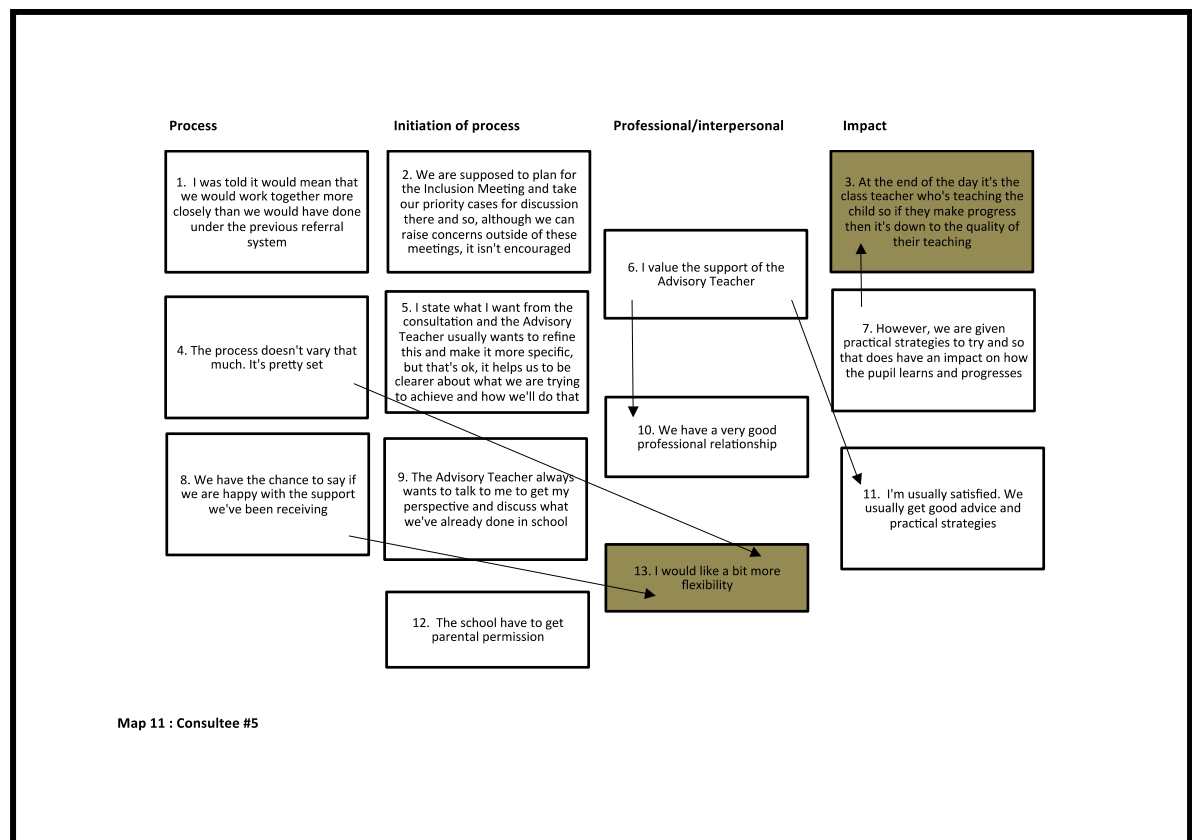
Map 10 – consultee 4



Map 10 – commentary and discussion

A SENCO with more than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. Grudging satisfaction with the process is what appears to be expressed (6, 10). There is contradiction here also. She states “I don’t feel like a partner” (7), whilst also stating “We work as colleagues” (3). Grudging acceptance of the process is also expressed in the comment that “ ..we work with them to get the best out of their support that we can” (11). There are some constructs around communication and role clarity. This SENCO is quite negative in her views and does not appear to feel that she has any control of the process.

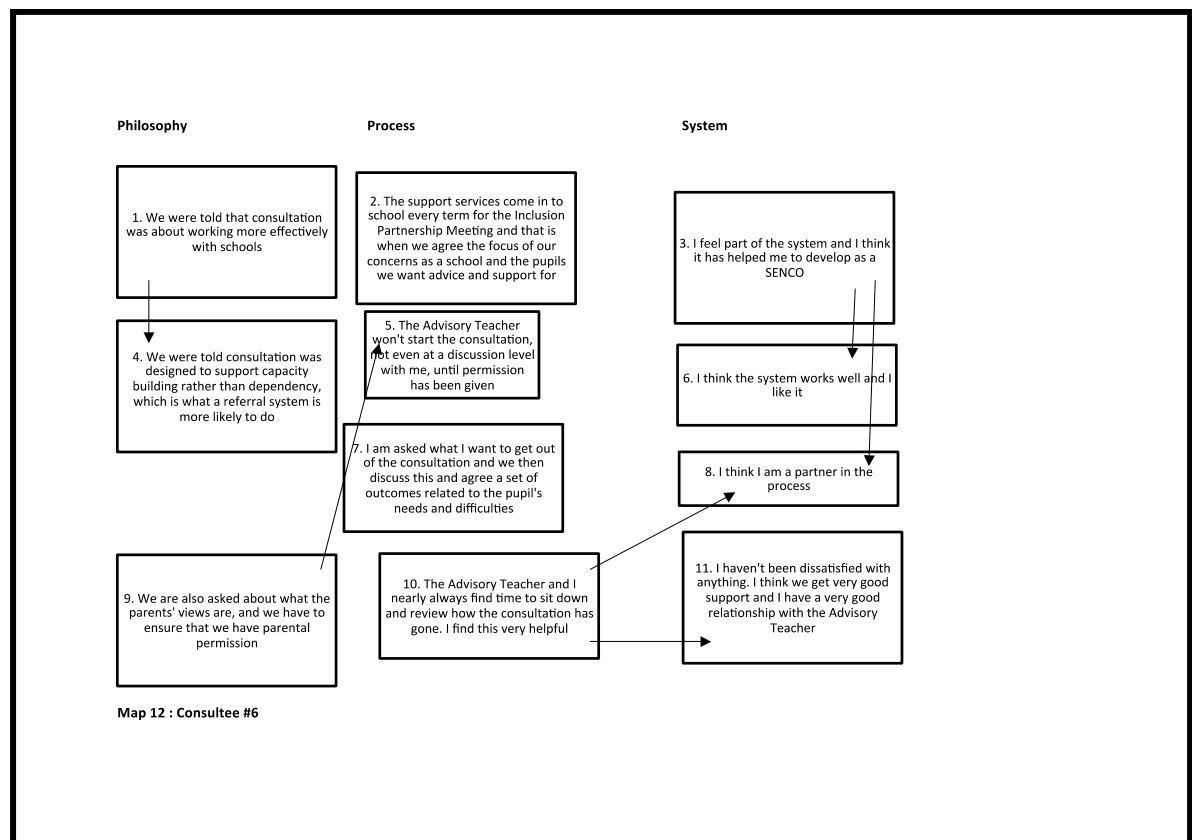
Map 11 – consultee 5



Map 11 – comments and discussion

A SENCO with less than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. Her construct system appears to be shaped by concerns re organisation and role (4, 13) but these statements are contradicted as she states “We have the chance to say if we are happy with the support we’ve been receiving” (8), and this does not gel with her previously expressed notion of inflexibility (13). Threat, with the mention of criticism and defensiveness is seen to depend on her perception of the class teacher’s worth versus the Advisory Teacher’s (6, 7, 10, 11 versus 3). The emphasis here seems dispositional rather than situational.

Map 12 – consultee 6



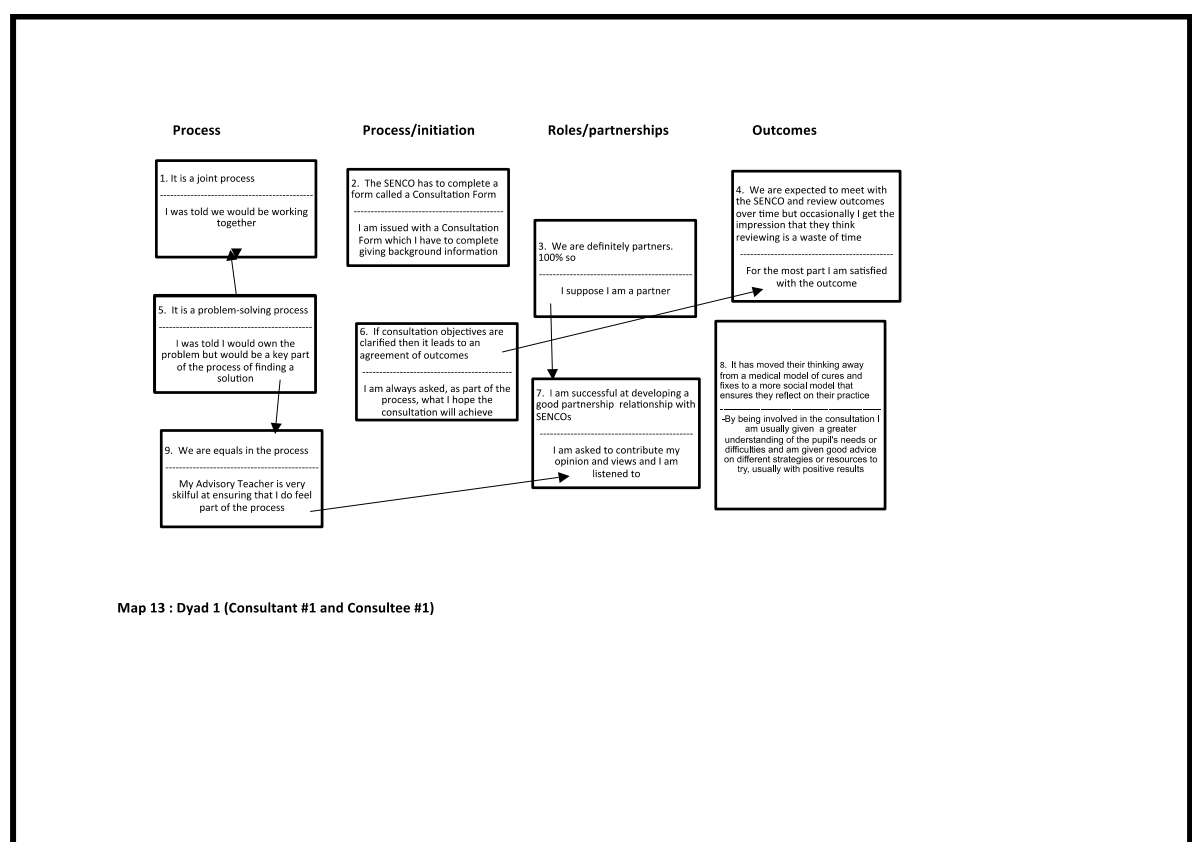
Map 12 – comments and discussion

A new SENCO in her first year in the role. She is quite positive about the process and system and does not express any concerns (1, 4). There are suggestions of passivity although these are not as immediately noticeable as they are for consultee 1. Passive phrases such as ‘we were told..’ (1, 4) are in evidence and are in contrast to ‘I feel part...’ (3). She is positive about interpersonal relationships (6, 8, 11) and the effect on her professional development, stating “I feel part of the system and I think it has helped me to develop as a SENCO” (3). As with the previous consultee the emphasis is dispositional rather than situational.

Dyad Maps 13 to 18 inclusive

It should be noted that in all Dyad maps, i.e. maps 13 to 18 inclusive, the consultants' comments are in the top half of each box and the consultees' comments are in the bottom half of the box in italics.

Map 13 – consultant 1 and consultee 1

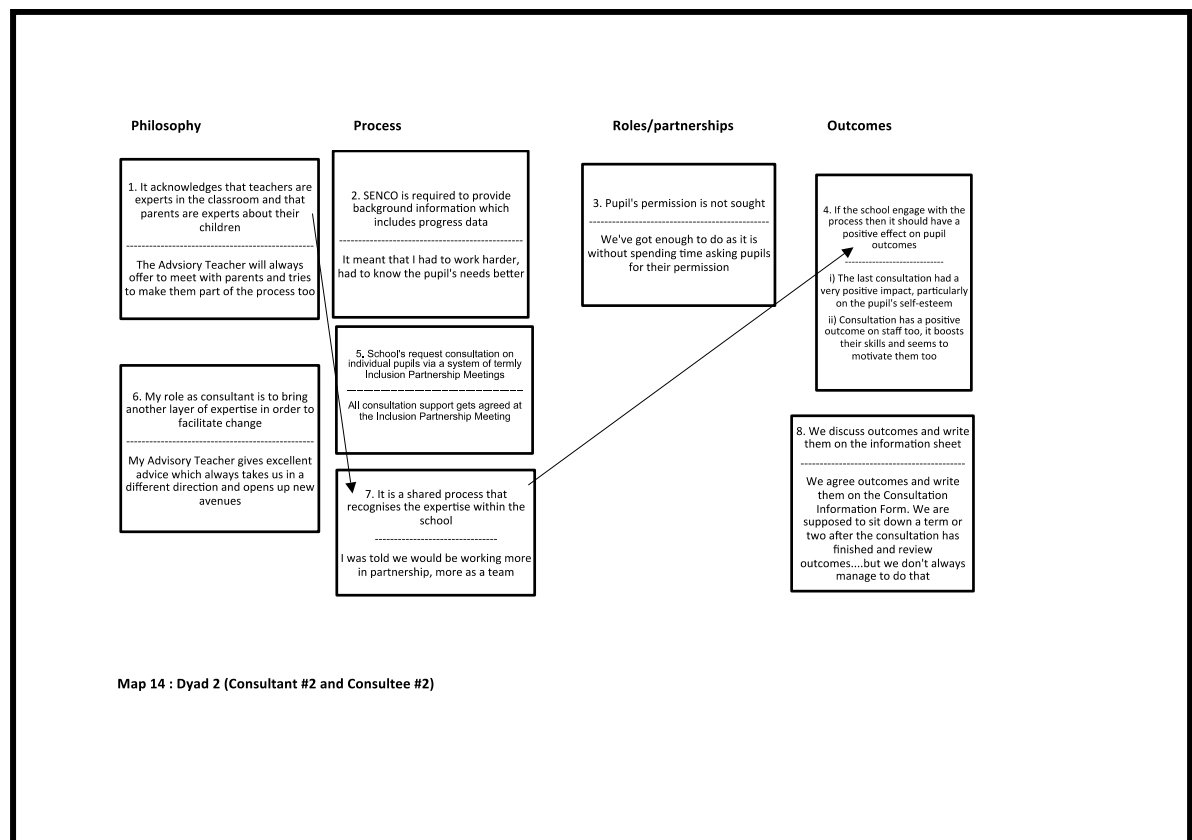


Map 13 – Dyad 1 comments and discussion

This first dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with over five years experience in the role of consultant and a SENCO with more than five years experience in the role of SENCO but less than five years experience in the role of consultee. It has already been noted (Map 1, p104) that threat or tension in the execution of the

process has been identified in the Advisory Teacher, and questions have also been raised about the quality of her communication skills. It has also been noted (Map 7, p110) that communication and interpersonal relationships shape this consultee's construct system. There are many responses that seem to mirror each other (1, 2, 5, 7, 8) and some that are similar but with subtle shifts that could be interpreted in a number of ways (6, 9). Key contrasts in their responses are shown in the construct of roles, which are described by the Advisory Teacher as "...definitely partners. 100% so" and by the SENCO who states, with less conviction, "I suppose I am a partner" (3). This again calls into question the quality of the communication skills employed. Key contrasts are seen again in the execution of the process where the Advisory Teacher is less than certain that the SENCO values the opportunity to review the process, whereas the SENCO does express satisfaction, "for the most part", with the outcome of the consultation (4).

Map 14 – consultant 2 and consultee 2

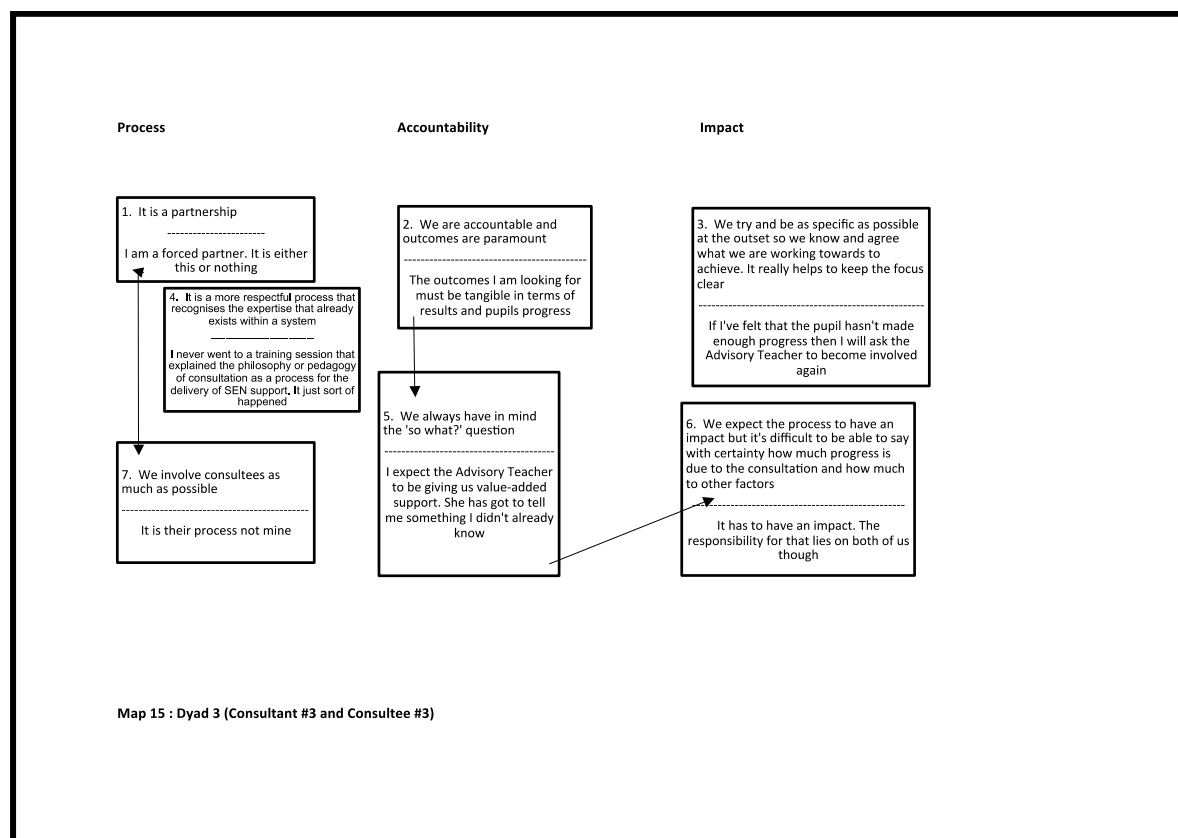


Map 14 – comments and discussion

This second dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with over five years experience in the role of consultant and a SENCO with less than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. There are more clearly defined constructs within this dyad, with the Advisory Teacher being concerned with status whilst the SENCO's primary construct revolves around the notion of quality. It is interesting to note that whilst the Advisory Teacher can be seen to have a number of contradictory views (1, 5, 16, and 3, 16; Map 2, p105) there are many responses from this dyad that are in close agreement (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8). It is also interesting to note that the SENCO's emphasis is dispositional which would afford some degree

of similarity to the Advisory Teacher's constructs around status related to the involvement of both consultees and pupils.

Map 15 – consultant 3 and consultee 3

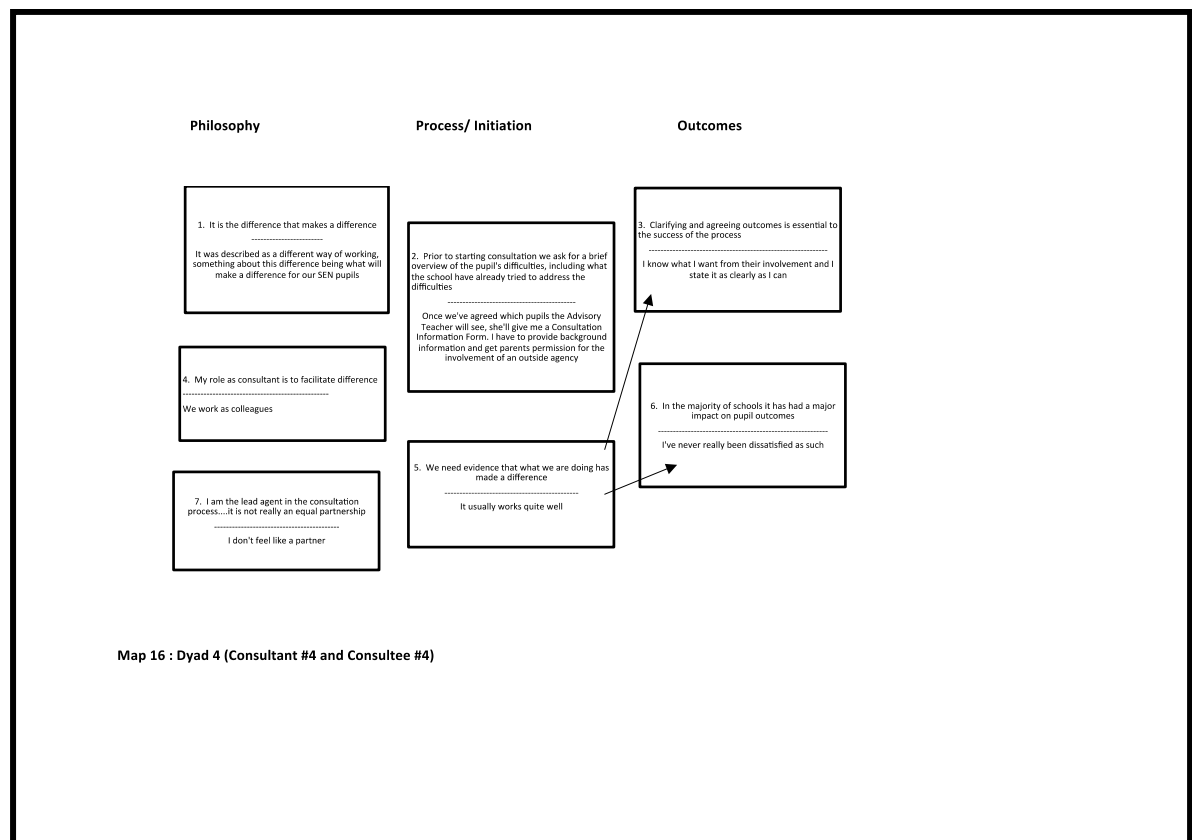


Map 15 – comments and discussion

This third dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with over five years experience in the role of consultant and a SENCO who also has more than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. It has already been noted that this is a very experienced SENCO who also has more than five years experience of working in a referral system. They appear to be well-matched in terms of their constructs as the Advisory Teacher's construct system relates to professionalism and perceptions of same, and the SENCO's relates to territory and control, but this

is closely linked to her perception of the professional ability of the Advisory Teacher. Reading their individual construct maps it would be reasonable to anticipate some conflict in the professional dynamic as both present as assertive and demanding, and this is illustrated clearly (1, 3, 4, 7). However, in an area of key importance for both, outcomes, they are in close agreement (2, 5, 6) and there is also tacit recognition of the professional ability of the Advisory Teacher when the SENCO acknowledges that “If I’ve felt that the pupil hasn’t made enough progress then I will ask the Advisory Teacher to become involved again”. It is the case in many schools that when a pupil has not made the expected progress following a period of consultation with an Advisory Teacher that SENCOs often then want to involve the Educational Psychologist with a view to possibly requesting a Statutory Assessment. The fact that this SENCO would seek further involvement from the Advisory Teacher may suggest a professional confidence and respect in the ability of the Advisory Teacher that is not articulated or even implied in a number of her responses (1, 4, 7)

Map 16 – consultant 4 and consultee 4

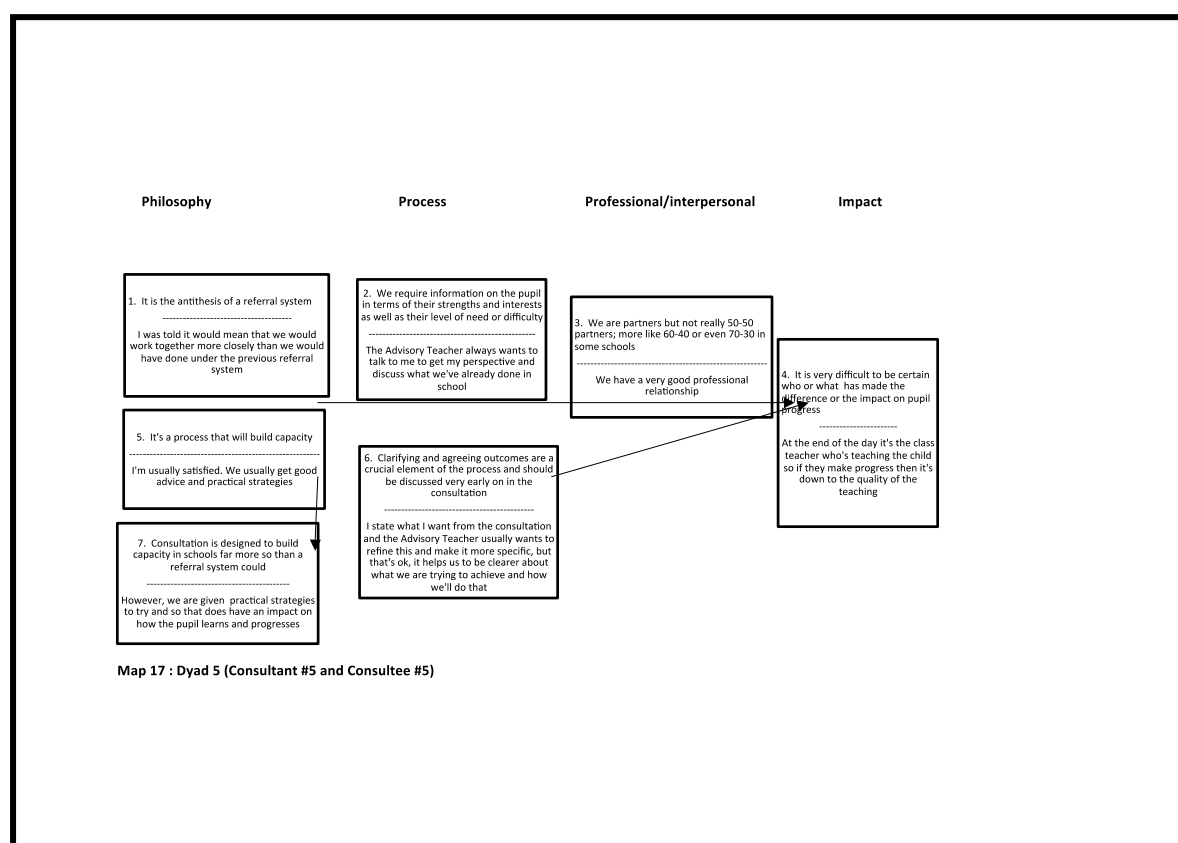


Map 16 – comments and discussion

This fourth dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with less than five years experience in the role of consultant and a SENCO with more than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. The language of the Advisory Teacher in this dyad is very focused on the word 'difference' (1, 4, 5) and this has been communicated to the SENCO who states "It was described as a different way of working, something about this difference being what will make a difference for our SEN pupils". Three uses of the word in one sentence! It is possible that as a less experienced Advisory Teacher this person felt a need to try and assert her position or knowledge by repeating phrases that she remembered from her training. However, it is equally possible that she felt that these phrases

communicated succinctly the philosophy of consultation and so used them in her discussions with SENCOs as useful illustrations of the purpose of the process. What is evident from their responses is that there is a clear understanding of their respective roles in the process (4, 7), though it is questionable that these respective roles of “lead agent” and ‘non-partner’ are roles that would be expected from participants in process consultation.

Map 17 – consultant 5 and consultee 5

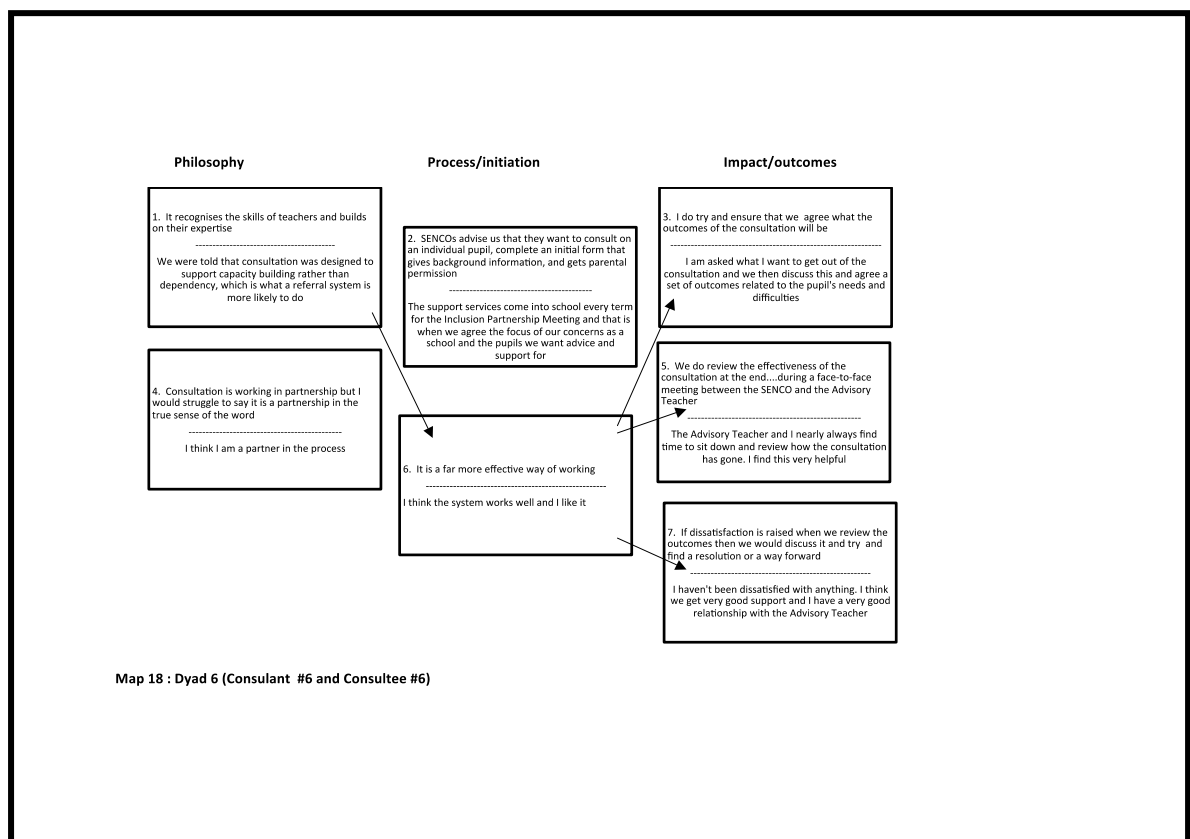


Map 17 – comments and discussion

This fifth dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with more than five years experience in the role of consultant and a SENCO with less than five years experience in the roles of both SENCO and consultee. What is particularly

interesting about this particular dyad is the fact that it was noted in Map 5 (p108) that the Advisory Teacher expressed some significant contradictions that suggest a possible lack of belief or confidence in the process of consultation and this lack of belief or confidence is then mirrored by the SENCO (4). Whether the SENCO has 'picked up' on the Advisory Teacher's ambivalence or whether these are totally her own beliefs is not clear. However, it could be argued that dispositional constructs together with contradictory communication has created a somewhat critical and defensive dynamic that is further confused by the SENCO's comment that "We have a very good professional relationship".

Map 18 – consultant 6 and consultee 6



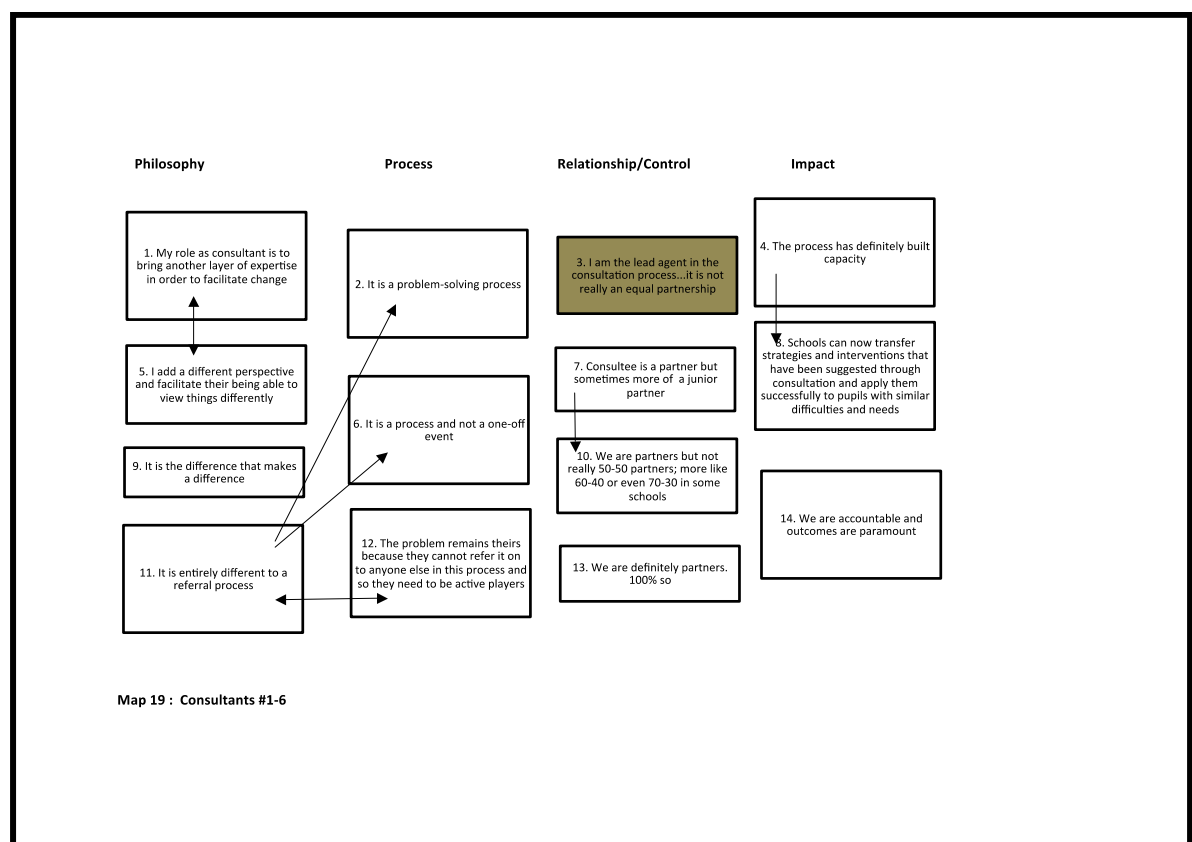
Map 18 – comments and discussion

The sixth and final dyad consists of an Advisory Teacher with more than five years experience in the role of consultant and a new SENCO in her first year in the role. There is a 'construct match' here in that the emphasis for both Advisory Teacher and SENCO is dispositional. The SENCO is very positive about both the underlying philosophy and the process of consultation (1, 5, 6, 7) and she states "I think I am a partner in the process". The Advisory Teacher's view however is different: "...I would struggle to say it is a partnership in the true sense of the word". The dyadic dynamic is interesting in that the Advisory Teacher presents as somewhat superior and condescending in her manner and thinking (1, 9, 13 in Map 6) and yet there are numerous, clear areas of consistent thought between both Advisory Teacher and SENCO (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7). This could be assumed to be due partly to the lack of experience of the SENCO and the fact that she is perhaps more readily guided than other SENCOs with greater experience. However, this is only one assumption and it could just as readily be suggested that a new SENCO would not have any pre-determined views of the role and would therefore embrace a different way of working more readily because he/she did not have anything to benchmark it against. Whatever the reason for this SENCO's positive view of consultation (6, 7) it does not alter the fact that she feels supported in being able to effectively meet the needs of pupils with SEN in her school (2, 7).

Summary maps 19 and 20

The following maps, maps 19 and 20, summarise and synthesise the responses of the respective professional groups. Map 19 relates to the responses of the Advisory Teacher consultants and Map 20 relates to the SENCO consultees.

Map 19 – consultants 1-6

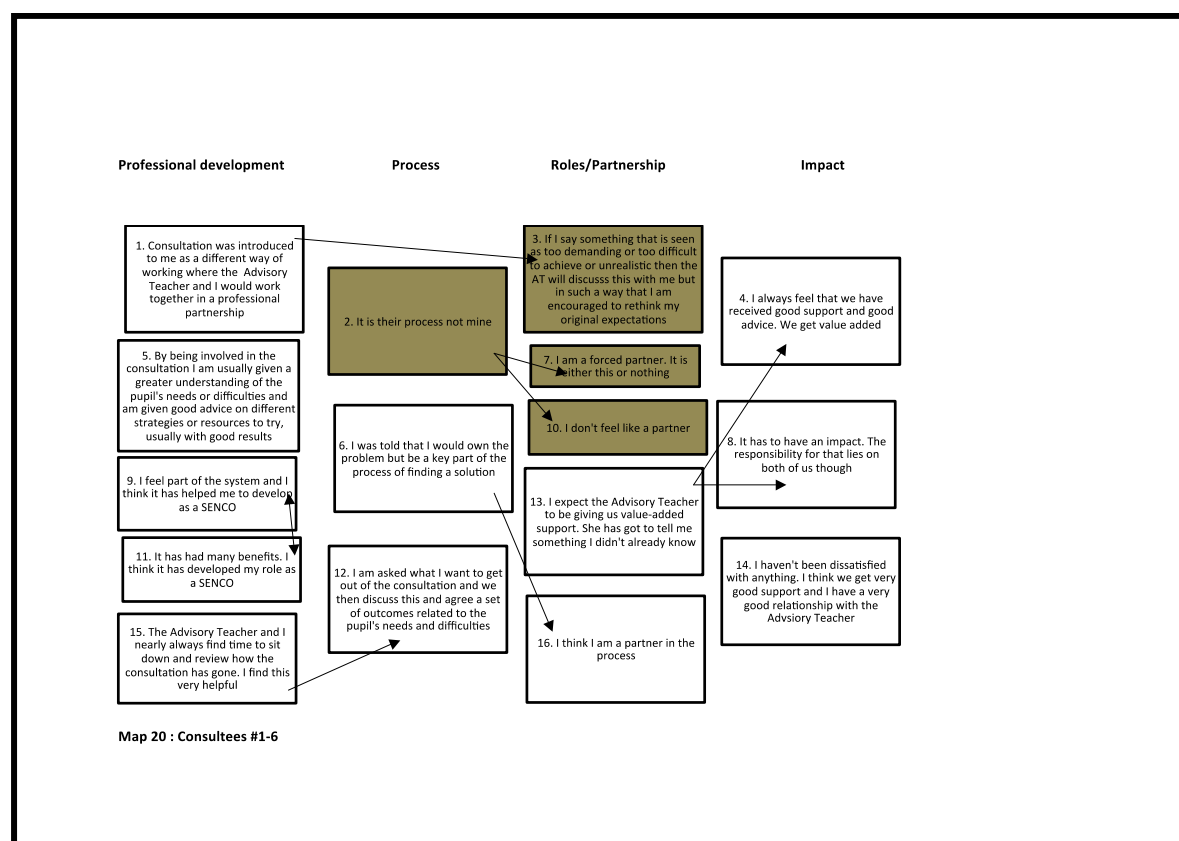


Map 19 – comments and discussion

Map 19 synthesises the responses of the Advisory Teachers in their role as consultants in the process. It is interesting to note that they are in agreement with each other in respect of the philosophy of the process, agreeing that it is about ‘difference’ (1, 5, 9) and about their bringing “another layer of expertise” (1). They are also in agreement with each other about the process (2, 12) and the impact of

that process (4, 8). However, there is significant disagreement and conflicting views in the area of 'Relationships/Control'. One Advisory Teacher is clear that she is the lead agent in the consultation process (3) and another is equally clear that it is a true partnership, "100% so" (13). The other Advisory Teachers are more considered, stating that the relationship is that of partners but that the balance of the partnership is subject to change and is dependent on the partners involved (7, 10).

Map 20 – consultees 1-6



Map 20 – comments and discussion

Map 20 synthesises the responses of the SENCOs in their role as consultees in the process. Some have explicitly identified key benefits to themselves in terms of their professional development (9, 11), but all have made positive comments in this area at varying levels (1, 5, 15). Similarly, there is agreement in the area of 'Impact' (4, 14). Differences of opinion occur in the areas of 'Process' and 'Roles/ Partnership'. There is a significantly negative comment expressed about process: "It is their process not mine" (2) which does not concur at any level with the notion of partnership working and respect for expertise. Similarly, there are negative comments expressed about their roles in the process (7, 10), although one SENCO is clear about her role, stating, "I think I am a partner in the process" (16). This was stated in a definite way i.e it was said in the manner of 'Yes, I do think I am a partner in the process' rather than in the uncertain sense of not being sure if she was a partner.

4.2 Observations of consultations in the two schools

Two observations were carried out in each school in the Summer Term and a further two observations in each school in the Autumn Term. School 1 was perceived to be pro- consultation, or at least positive about consultation, and the observations in that school involved consultee 6 and consultant 6 in all of the four observations. School 2 was perceived to be anti-consultation or, at best, a reluctant participant in the process of consultation, and the consultations in that school involved consultee 3 in all of the four observations, and consultants 3 and 4

in two observations each, for reasons explained in 3.18. The Consultation Observation Proforma, detailed in 3.19, was utilised during the observations in order to support consistency and the results of these observations are detailed in the following sections.

4.3 Observation 1 in school 1

In preparation for the first observation at school 1 I arrived at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for the consultation, for the reasons previously explained in 3.17. However, I then had to wait for the SENCO consultee in the school's reception area, as this was part of the school's safeguarding procedures, that is, that visitors were not permitted past the reception area unless accompanied by a member of staff. I therefore thought that I was not going to be able to be in position in the room where the consultation was going to take place in advance of both parties, as I had intended. However, the consultee came to the reception area after a few minutes and took me to the allotted room for the consultation. The room to be used was the 'SEN Room' and this room was a small classroom that was both the SENCO's base, used for her liaison with parents and outside agencies, and also the room where individual and small group teaching was undertaken for pupils on the SEN register. The room had three cluster arrangements of tables, each cluster capable of seating eight people. I asked the consultee which table she intended using for the consultation, and I then elected to sit at an adjoining table that would clearly be within easy sight and sound of the consultation but not quite as intrusive as sitting at the same table would be. The SENCO was then called to reception as the Advisory Teacher consultant had

arrived, and I was left in the room for a few minutes and so was able to get myself settled and ready for the observation, which I found preferable to being in the situation of having to get out my resources for taking field-notes whilst the consultation participants were both present.

Results	Comments and discussion
<p>As the consultee and consultant entered the room they were talking conversationally about the weather and how they were hoping for better when the school summer holidays arrived. Whilst they were getting themselves seated the consultant then asked the consultee if her daughter was feeling better and whether her cold had affected her in a recent piano examination.</p> <p>The consultant then moved the conversation seamlessly into the professional arena. She started by thanking the consultee for raising this particular pupil for consultation and asked if the consultee had brought the completed Consultation Information Form (Appendix 4) with her, which included the necessary parental permission for the involvement of SEN</p>	<p>This conversation only lasted a few minutes but it had already become evident to me, as the observer, that these professionals had a good rapport with each other, that their knowledge of each other had extended beyond the professional relationship and that they were comfortable in sharing some personal information and engaging in conversations beyond the purely professional.</p>

<p>support services. The consultee produced the completed form and apologised for not having returned it prior to the consultation today, stating that there had been a number of staff absences and that she had been required to provide some cover and consequently she had not had her usual amount of 'SENCO time'. The consultant said "That's alright, don't worry. You've done really well by managing to complete it in time for our consultation today. I know how difficult it is when you have to do cover. Shall we go through it together and then you can flesh out your concerns for me and together we can come up with a plan of intervention for pupil X? I'm particularly interested to know what your key concerns are, and also what interventions you have already tried and how effective these have been."</p> <p>The consultee agreed and then proceeded to read out information from the Consultation Information Form, but at the same time expanding on the written information. For example, she read 'Her</p>	<p>The consultant's expression of empathy with the pressures of the SENCO role was an indicator that they would be working together in partnership and in a 'no-blame' framework. The consultee looked more relaxed following this response from the consultant and this was shown by her facial expression and her body language as her shoulders seemed to relax and she looked less tense.</p>
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<p>current attainment level in reading is 2b and in writing is 1c' and then went on to state that the pupil had not made any progress at all in year 5 despite having had additional small group support for reading using 'Beat Dyslexia' and following a published handwriting programme; and 'Parents say that they are very concerned because she is not making any progress with her reading', then adding that the class teacher has noticed that the pupil is now becoming reluctant to read aloud in class and that last time the teacher spoke to parents they said that her brother, who is in year 3, is reading the same books that she is and this is obviously affecting her self-esteem.</p> <p>As the consultee was reading through the Consultation Information Form and elaborating on the pupil information contained in it, the consultant was listening carefully, making some notes and asking pertinent questions that further fleshed out the information being presented. For example, when the consultee said that the pupil had not made any progress in reading</p>	<p>The consultant practised active listening, giving plenty of eye contact and plenty of non-verbal communication such as nodding as well as encouraging the consultee to continue by using verbal prompts such as 'ok' and 'mmm'. The questions that the consultant asked were all open questions that challenged the consultee to provide more detailed information and to explore her own understanding of the pupil information she was presenting eg consultant said "You say that 'Beat Dyslexia' hasn't worked. What would progress have looked like if it had worked?"</p>
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<p>and writing since being in year 5, the consultant asked her about the pupil's progress in other areas, such as speaking and listening and maths. She also asked about the progress of other pupils with SEN in that class and year group, saying that it might be a good idea to check that this pupil's lack of progress is not part of a wider picture that may need exploring. The consultee did not have this information with her and said that she would be able to go and get it, but the consultant said "Let's carry on going through the form because there may be other additional information that we'll need and then it'll save you running around too much."</p> <p>After about half an hour, once the consultee had completed reading through the Consultation Information Form together with providing additional information, the consultant said "Thank you very much for raising this pupil for consultation. All that information has painted a very good picture of pupil X. Now, what do you think you would you like us to achieve at the end of</p>	<p>By continuing the discussion in this way the consultant was ensuring that the flow of information from the consultee was not interrupted whilst at the same time showing regard for her time by giving the message that one trip to gather any additional information was preferable.</p> <p>By repeating the 'Thank you' phrase the consultant was reinforcing the partnership nature of the consultation relationship. It also demonstrated an element of</p>
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<p>the consultation process? What is going to be a good outcome for you in relation to this pupil?" The consultee appeared used to this question, replying straight away that she was looking for strategies to support the pupil's progress in reading and handwriting. The consultant agreed that these sounded like the right outcomes for the consultation, but still probed, asking "What difference do you think this will make for (pupil)?" and "Why do you think that?" She then added that she was concerned that the pupil is starting to get frustrated and that they will need to keep a watchful eye on this. The consultant then asked a few questions about the pupil's self-esteem, saying that she would like to discuss this further with parents if they are willing to come in to school and participate in the consultation.</p> <p>The consultant then returned to the question of outcomes, and the consultee said that she was just looking for overall progress. The consultant probed a bit further, encouraging the consultee to describe what this overall progress would</p>	<p>professional courtesy, acknowledging that the consultee has played an important part in the process by furnishing the consultation with a detailed pen-portrait of the school's concerns around this pupil's learning.</p> <p>The consultant was using solution-focused techniques and language here. She refrained from asking 'The Miracle Question' (de Shazer, 1985) but that is the direction her questions were taking as she was basically asking to consultee to visualise what progress would look like for the pupil and then to describe that verbally. It was a powerful model to employ as it required the consultee to focus on each of the areas of concern that she had raised and then to be very specific in terms of measurable outcomes. The consultant was prepared to question the consultee at length until she was satisfied with the specificity of the response, but she did this in a non-threatening way, using probing questions such as "I'm not sure that I'm</p>
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<p>look like, asking “How will we know, in terms of pupil progress, that we have achieved the consultation objectives? We’ll expect to see progress against National Curriculum levels but that is longer term. What else will progress look like?” This pattern of probing and clarifying what progress would look like was repeated for the outcome relating to handwriting that the consultee had identified. The consultant used solution-focused language throughout, asking the consultee several times to clarify what progress for this pupil would look like.</p> <p>The consultee participated with this process of refining the agreed outcomes. On two occasions she was observed to sigh, although this was almost imperceptible. During this stage of the consultation she also sat further back in her chair, folded her arms and gave less eye contact than previously. When the outcomes had been clarified to the consultant’s apparent satisfaction she wrote them on to the Consultation Information Form, checking that the consultee was happy with the</p>	<p>clear about what you’re looking at in terms of progress, can you talk me through that again?” and “I understand that you are looking to achieve progress with reading and want to measure this in terms of reading and spelling of High Frequency Words but should we also be looking at changes in attitude too? For instance, the pupil’s willingness to read aloud in class or increase in reading for pleasure?”</p> <p>The consultee responded verbally to this probing but her body language definitely suggested that she was feeling threatened and uncomfortable. Her sighing suggested that she knew what was about to happen – ie the probing questions – and it was almost as if she was resigning herself to a part of the process she was familiar with but did not feel comfortable with. Her response of “That’s fine” at the end sounded as if it was said with some relief.</p>
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<p>wording. The consultee said “That’s fine”.</p> <p>The consultant then asked if there was anything else that should be put in place for (pupil) but the consultee said ‘no’.</p> <p>The consultant said that they will review the outcomes at an appropriate point in the future. Again, the consultee seemed used to this and appeared familiar with this part of the process, saying “Yes, that’s ok. As I said, I’m a bit snowed under at the moment so can we arrange that next term?” The consultant agreed that was fine.</p> <p>The consultant then moved the consultation on, saying “Well, I think we’ve done well this morning and I appreciate your time when you’re under so much pressure with absences and so on. I’ve now got a clear picture about your concerns around this pupil and we’ve managed to agree the outcomes that we’ll be working towards and we’re both clear on what that will look like. Before we finish let’s review our</p>	<p>The consultee’s demeanour altered subtly at this point and she again showed a level of trust and familiarity with the consultant in that she felt able to disclose how she was feeling in terms of her workload (“a bit snowed under”) rather than just stating the nature of her current workload and saying that she was very busy at present. This is quite a subtle difference in the information given but one that is telling in terms of the relationship between the two professionals.</p> <p>The consultant reinforced the partnership nature of the process by using the phrase “.. we’ve done well this morning..” whilst at the same time showing that she had been actively listening and had heard and understood the consultee’s concerns about her workload.</p> <p>Use of ‘our’ reinforces the notion of</p>
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<p>consultation and clarify what we have both agreed to do. If we can just agree the next steps in the process in terms of my involvement then I won't need to take up any more of your time" She then went on to book a time for an in-class observation, asking the consultee to suggest what she thought would be the most appropriate lesson/activity for the observation. The consultant also asked if some time could be arranged for her to meet with the class teacher after the observation so that she could discuss what she had observed and get the views of the teacher as to whether this would have been usual or not. The consultee stated that this may be a problem if absences continued, but that she would do her best to arrange it. The consultant thanked her for her support and said that she may want to do some direct work with the pupil but that she would wait until after the observation to confirm any additional involvement, asking if the consultee was happy to leave these next steps flexible at this stage, which the consultee agreed that she was. The consultation was then</p>	<p>partnership working.</p> <p>The use of this phrase "I won't take up any more of your time" was another example of the consultant showing that she understood the pressures of the SENCO role and her choice of language was a demonstration of empathy on her part.</p> <p>The consultation will be at its most effective if as many staff as possible who are relevant to the process are able to engage in it (Wagner, 2004). The fact that the consultant thanked the consultee for her support, rather than pointing out the obvious in terms of staff engagement in the process, was another opportunity to reinforce the collaborative nature of the process and the importance of that partnership, rather than to do the same thing in a more negative way by pointing it out directly.</p>
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finished and I was escorted back to the reception area by the SENCO.	
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4.4 Observation 2 in school 1

The second observation took place two weeks after the first observation and involved the same consultee and consultant. I followed the same procedure, arriving at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time, being met by the SENCO consultee and being escorted to the room where the consultation was going to be held. The same room was being used and so my preparations and seating arrangements were the same as for the previous observation.

Results	Comments and discussion
<p>The Advisory Teacher consultant and the SENCO consultee came into the meeting together, talking conversationally about their plans for the summer holidays.</p> <p>Once they were seated the consultee started the professional conversation, asking if the consultant had received the completed Consultation Information Form for the pupil that she had posted and saying that she was catching up on her work now and that she was sorry that the form had</p>	<p>This again demonstrated that there existed a comfortable relationship between the two participants and that they were able to engage in 'small talk'; their conversation was not just restricted to the professional.</p> <p>The consultee started the professional discussion in this observation, showing that she was confident in her role in the partnership. It also suggests that she views her role as more of an equal partnership as she was not deferring to the consultant in the sense that it was the prerogative of the</p>

<p>not been sent to the Advisory Teacher in advance of the previous consultation. The consultant assured her that this was not a problem, saying that it happens like that regularly in some schools. She then reiterated that it was not a problem at all. The consultant then said “Shall we go through the consultation form together so that I can be really clear about your concerns and we can then plan a way forward that will make a difference for pupil Y?”</p> <p>The consultant then proceeded to read</p>	<p>consultant to initiate the professional discussion. The consultee was also demonstrating a feeling of trust in the relationship in that she was able to talk frankly about ‘catching up on her work’ rather than masking recent difficulties with workload with a less candid comment. The consultant’s response was non-judgmental and re-assuring, two qualities that are advantageous to the consultation process. The consultant then made a subtle shift of position by taking control of the conversation. As an observer I felt that this choice of language, although collaborative and pro-active as shown by the use of words such as ‘together’ ‘we can then plan’, was also subtly putting the consultant in the senior partner position by the use of ‘I’. The phrase ‘..so I can be really clear about your concerns..’ signalled a power change in the conversation and the relationship at that particular point and highlighted how critical the choice of language is to the process of consultation.</p> <p>The fact that the consultant read through</p>
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<p>through parts of the Consultation Information Form, focusing on particular sections and asking questions in order to gain some additional information. For example, she said “In terms of pupil’s views you have stated on the form that she likes school but is finding maths difficult, and then in the ‘main concerns’ section you have stated Maths, grasp of place value; and writing and spelling. However, in the ‘strategies already tried’ section you have written RML 1-3, 1 to 1 spelling probes and 1 to 2 times tables. I’m unclear as to what the current situation is with her maths progress as you have also stated that she is currently working at 1a/2c for maths. It somehow doesn’t seem to marry up. She’s year 4, has worked on 1 times table, is at 1a/2c and you have concerns about place value. What else can you tell me about her maths progress and your interventions to date?”</p> <p>The consultee then proceeded to provide further information, stating that maths homework is differentiated for her. The</p>	<p>the form, rather than asking the consultee to read it as in the first observation, seemed to reinforce that, at that particular point in the process, she was in control – the senior partner perhaps – of the direction of the process. Although conducted in a courteous and friendly manner I felt that the balance of power, or of partnership, had shifted significantly. For someone to read somebody else’s work and then to question them about it reminded me of the teacher-pupil relationship or even, and more extreme, of a lawyer cross-examining a witness. As an observer I found it slightly uncomfortable to watch but I did not observe any change in the consultee’s body language to suggest that she shared my discomfort.</p>
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<p>consultee asked if this was completed by the pupil on a regular basis but the consultee did not know. The consultant asked about the pupil's knowledge and understanding of maths vocabulary, asking if the pupil understood terms such as 'match' and 'order'. Again, the consultee said she was not sure but that she would be able to find out. The consultant thanked her for that but said that it may be better if she carries out an observation in maths and then has a discussion with the class teacher in which she can gather this additional information. The consultee agreed that this would be a good way forward.</p> <p>The consultation continued in this manner for a further twenty five minutes, with the consultant asking questions that drilled down in to the information on the form, eg "Why do you think that happened? What do you think would happen if this was tried? What is your hypothesis of (pupil's) needs?"</p> <p>The consultee engaged in the process throughout, providing what information she could or stating that she would need to find</p>	<p>The use of thanks caused a shift in the relationship again as the courtesy of the language used seemed to re-dress the balance slightly.</p> <p>The consultee answered all questions in a fairly passive manner.</p>
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<p>out from the class teacher. The consultant then said that they should agree some objectives for the consultation, saying, “What will progress look like for this pupil at the end of the consultation? I am not certain that spelling is one of the key concerns for this pupil, as you have said that the probes are working and that she is making slow but steady progress in that area. I would suggest focusing very specifically on maths, as this is a major concern for you and (pupil) herself has said that she would like some help with maths. What do you think?”</p> <p>The consultee readily agreed and the consultant then asked her to specify what she wanted the consultation to achieve for this pupil, again using the phrase “What will progress look like?” After some further discussion they agreed the consultation objectives, and the consultant then booked a diary date for an in-class observation and a discussion with the class teacher. The consultant then thanked the consultee for her time and asked her if she had any further questions, which she did not, and so the consultation ended.</p>	<p>At this point the consultant was again taking control of the process and the partnership balance shifted again with the consultant definitely being the leading or senior partner. This was demonstrated more forcefully when the consultant suggested that the consultee’s key concern of spelling was, in her own opinion, not as compelling as the concerns re maths.</p> <p>As in the first observation the consultant was using probing questions and solution-focused language (‘what will progress look like?’) to clarify the consultation objective but, in this observation, the consultee seemed more at ease and did not exhibit any of the non-verbal signs of discomfort that were discussed in the ‘comments and discussion’ section in 4.4. One hypothesis for this could be that she was now feeling</p>
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	more in control of her work-load and therefore was feeling less stressed and so able to engage more confidently in a challenging and probing discussion.
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4.5 Observation 3 in school 1

The third observation at school 1 took place in the first half of the Autumn Term and involved the same consultee and consultant. In preparation for this observation I again arrived at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for the reasons previously explained. Once again I was required to wait for the SENCO consultee in the school's reception area, as this was part of the school's safeguarding procedures. The consultee again arrived promptly and took me to the allotted room for the consultation which was the same room used for the previous two consultations that I had observed. Again, I positioned myself at an adjoining table. The SENCO and I had a conversation about general issues for a few minutes and she was then called to reception as the Advisory Teacher consultant had arrived.

Results	Comments and discussion
As the consultee and consultant entered the room they were talking conversationally about non work-related topics.	Again I was struck by the good relationship they obviously had with each other.
As soon as they were both seated the consultant turned the conversation to	Once again the consultant used thanks as a means of conveying not only appreciation

<p>business. She first of all thanked the consultee for returning a Consultation Information Form that contained “so much useful information”. She referred to it, saying, “I can see why you are concerned with her (pupil) progress, as it’s obvious that you have been implementing a number of strategies to try and address her areas of difficulty. Can you put a bit more flesh on the bones now and tell me a bit more about the concerns and the progress to date?”</p> <p>The consultee then spoke at length about the pupil’s difficulties, referring to information on the Consultation Information Form and also producing some of the pupil’s books to illustrate her concerns with handwriting and recording of information.</p>	<p>for the consultee’s adherence to the required protocols (return of the Consultation Information Form) but also as a means of starting the process on a very positive and affirmative note. It was interesting to note that in this consultation session the Consultation Information Form had been received in advance, the consultant had had the opportunity to read it in advance, and consequently neither participant needed to read the information during the consultation session. The consultant was able to acknowledge at the start of the consultation that the school had been implementing strategies to address the pupil’s difficulties and this made for a positive start to the meeting. This was shown by the consultee’s facial expression, which relaxed. This meant that at this early point in the consultation session both participants appeared to be on an even footing and thus were able to engage in the process on a more even partnership basis than had been observed in the previous two observations.</p>
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<p>When the consultee started to speak of the behaviour concerns that she had, she produced an Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence (ABC) chart, saying “We’ve completed one of these as we did for (another) pupil”. The consultant thanked her for doing that, saying that this would be very helpful and would hopefully provide some useful insights.</p>	<p>The consultant saying thank you to the consultee is emerging as a key feature of this consultant’s repertoire of comments/statements. The use of the ABC chart is evidence of transference of skills and strategies and is an example of the ripple or multiplier effect (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989)</p>
<p>The consultant allowed the consultee to speak at length during this part of the consultation, not interrupting much other than to make encouraging comments such as “I can see that”; “Yes, that is a concern” and “That is difficult for the teacher. How did she respond?” After about twenty minutes, once the consultee had shared all the information that she had brought to the meeting, the consultant then said “Thank you for raising this pupil for consultation. Now, what would you like us to achieve at the end of the consultation process? What will be a positive outcome for you in relation to this pupil? There are elements of this situation that remind me of (pupil name)</p>	<p>This was the longest time span of ‘uninterrupted’ speech by the consultee in the observations so far.</p> <p>The continuing theme of ‘thanks’ and ‘us/we’.</p> <p>This method of probing and questioning in order to determine consultation outcomes is emerging as a key theme. The consultee appeared in this consultation to be clearer</p>

<p>and we were really successful in achieving progress there weren't we?" The consultee appeared used to this, replying straight away that she was looking for strategies to support the pupil's concentration, her handwriting and also her increasingly disruptive behaviour. The consultant agreed that these sounded like the right outcomes for the consultation, adding that she was concerned that the increase in the disruptive and distracting behaviours sounds indicative of a pupil who is becoming frustrated by her inability to engage successfully in the increasing demands of the tasks she is presented with.</p> <p>The consultant then probed further into the topic of concentration, asking for additional information about the pupil's current levels of concentration in various activities and also asking the consultee to describe what improvement will look like in this specific area. Again, the consultee appeared to be used to this question, replying that the pupil starts all tasks willingly but does not seem to maintain her concentration for more than</p>	<p>in her mind about the outcomes she was anticipating and she articulated these with more confidence than had been seen in the previous consultations. This could be attributed to her being better prepared for the consultation and thus appearing more confident and assured in her presentation and discussion of the issues</p> <p>The consultant used solution-focused language in her questioning which had the effect of making the consultee 'do the work' in terms of determining the outcomes she was hoping to achieve.</p>
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<p>a few minutes irrespective of the activity.</p> <p>She went on to say that any increase in concentration would be an improvement and would also be expected to have a positive impact on her tendency to distract and disrupt other pupils. The consultant then probed a bit further, asking the consultee to describe what the improved level of concentration would look like, asking “How will we know, in terms of concentration, that we have achieved the consultation objectives?” This pattern of probing and clarifying what progress would look like was repeated for the other two outcomes that the consultee had identified.</p> <p>When the outcomes had been clarified to the consultant’s satisfaction she wrote them</p>	<p>The consultee appeared to be struggling a bit here in terms of being able to clarify what ‘an increase in concentration’ would actually look like and how she would know that it had been achieved. The consultant was skilful in continuing to probe and to encourage the consultee to refine the expected outcome without appearing to badger her or show disregard for what she had already said. She did this by maintaining a relaxed body posture that mirrored the consultee’s and also by maintaining an even tone of voice that did not convey any impatience or irritation. The consultant continued to use solution-focused language throughout, asking the consultee to describe what ‘difference’ would look like and how they would know that it had been achieved. Again, the consultee seemed used to this and appeared at ease with this process of checking, maintaining a relaxed body posture and facial expression throughout.</p>
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<p>on to the Consultation Information Form, checking that the consultee was happy with the wording, and saying that they will review the outcomes at an appropriate point in the future.</p> <p>The consultant then moved to conclude the consultation meeting, saying “Well, we’ve done well this morning and agreed a positive way forward. You’ve really clarified your concerns around this pupil and we’ve managed to agree the outcomes that we’ll be working towards and we’re both clear on what that will look like. Now, let’s have a look at what the next steps in the process should be in terms of my involvement. Can you just go over our agreed actions and I’ll write the down to make sure we don’t miss anything”. The consultee summarised the actions and the consultant then went on to book a time for an in-class observation, asking the consultee to suggest what she thought would be the most appropriate lesson/activity for the observation. The consultant also asked if some time could be arranged for her to meet with the class</p>	<p>The choice of language by the consultant promoted the notion of partnership working and collaboration. In just two sentences she used the word ‘we’ four times (we’ve; we’ve; we’ll; we’re). She also praised the consultee’s role in the process by the comment “You’ve really clarified your concerns...” and, when talking about her own role in the process she focused on the ‘next steps’ rather than giving herself any credit for the smooth and productive conduct of the consultation session.</p>
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<p>teacher after the observation so that she could discuss what she had observed and get the views of the teacher as to whether this would have been usual or not. The consultee stated that this would not be a problem and that she would be able to cover for the teacher to allow the two of them to meet. The consultant thanked her for her support and said that she may want to do some work with the pupil but that she would wait until after the observation had been carried out to confirm any additional involvement, asking if the consultee was happy to leave the next steps flexible at this stage, which the consultee agreed that she was.</p> <p>The consultant then ended the session by thanking the consultee for making time for the consultation and for being so well-prepared, saying “What a team we make! That was a good morning’s work wasn’t it?”</p> <p>The consultation was then over and the consultant went elsewhere in the school to</p>	<p>The offer to provide cover suggests that the consultee is fully engaged in the on-going process, not just feeling that her part is completed after this session and the consultant can now proceed to ‘get on with it’. There was no suggestion that the ‘problem’ was now being handed over to the consultant as per the referral process.</p> <p>The theme of ‘thanks’ both started and concluded the consultation session. The consultant, in her summary here, did appear to step in to a more dominant ‘senior partner’ role as she took sole control for concluding the meeting, albeit in a respectful manner.</p> <p>The consultee smiled and appeared very much at ease at the end of the session.</p>
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carry out some other pre-planned work and the consultee escorted me back to the reception area to sign out.	This continued as I was escorted to the reception area, giving the impression that she felt the session had been productive.
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4.6 Observation 4 in school 1

The fourth observation again involved the same consultee and consultant and took place in the early part of the second half of the Autumn Term. The arrival process was slightly different for this observation as the Advisory Teacher consultant had been working in the school prior to this consultation appointment and was already in the SEN room when I was escorted there by the SENCO consultee. However, other than that, the observation arrangements were the same in terms of the room and the seating arrangements.

Results	Comments and Discussion
As I seated myself the consultant spent a few minutes updating the consultee on the direct work she had just completed with a different pupil prior to this consultation. She then asked about two other pupils she had been involved with via consultation and the consultee reported that both were making good progress, and that one had developed a more positive attitude to school. The consultant then said "Well, let's move on. We're now going to have a look at pupil Z in	This consultation started with the consultant very much in senior partner mode. One hypothesis for this is that she was moving the conversation from the professional to the professional rather than from the social to the professional, as in the previous consultations observed, and so perhaps she was not as mentally prepared in terms of her use of language and her awareness of the dominance of her personality when in full professional mode. The consultant did

<p>year 5 and I want to thank you for requesting consultation on this pupil and for completing and sending me the Consultation Information Form. You have given me some really useful information and painted a clear pen-portrait of his difficulties and I can see why you are concerned. This pupil sounds like someone who has had difficulties for some time but has been ticking along making slow but steady progress. He finished Key Stage 1 with 1b to 1c across the board but it seems as if the gap between him and his peers is widening as he moves up Key Stage 2. I was pleased to see that you've been using Rapid with him, as we know what pleasing results we've had using that with other pupils. However, I was quite concerned that you haven't seen the expected progress with pupil Z. What are your thoughts about why this might be the case?"</p> <p>The consultee responded, stating that she was very worried about his progress in literacy. She said that his attendance record is good, no absences since September, and</p>	<p>exhibit an element of dominance at this early stage, giving the impression that she was the person in-charge of the process. This meant that the consultation commenced with the consultant very firmly in the senior partner role, although she did then revert to her previously observed behaviour of thanking the consultee for requesting the consultation and completing the requisite Consultation Information Form.</p> <p>Once again it was observed that the consultant was not jumping in with her own hypotheses but was using questions to encourage the consultee to suggest a hypothesis of her own.</p>
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<p>that the Rapid programme has been implemented by the same teaching assistant who had worked with another pupil with such success. She said that parents were supportive of school but concerned about the lack of progress and that they would like to meet with the consultant. The consultant said that she would be pleased to meet with parents, but she would like to undertake some direct assessment work with the pupil before she did, and she asked the consultee if she thought that would be alright. The consultee said that it would and she asked the consultant if she thought that the pupil's difficulties might be specific, saying "Do you think he might have dyslexia?" The consultant said that she would not want to jump to a hasty conclusion, but neither would she want them to rule anything out. She then asked why she was querying dyslexia, saying "I wouldn't have initially thought of dyslexia based on the information you provided on the Consultation Information Form, so what is prompting you to query dyslexia? What</p>	<p>The consultant was being very engaging at this point and appeared to have moved into a role where both participants were of equal status in the professional relationship. This was seen by her response to meeting the parents and her checking with the consultee that carrying out some direct assessment work prior to meeting parents would be acceptable. The consultant continued her role of questioning and probing when the consultee queried dyslexia. She did make an initial comment of surprise ("I wouldn't have initially thought of dyslexia..") but she did not dismiss the possibility, asking the consultee to expand on her thoughts.</p>
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<p>have you noticed about his learning profile that suggests that this is an avenue we should explore?" The consultee said that she had done some individual work with pupil Z in order to help her complete the Consultation Information Form and that she was struck by how knowledgeable he appeared to be about topics of particular interest to him, such as 'The Lord of the Rings' and football. She said that when talking about 'The Lord of The Rings' he said that his dad had read the books to him and he had found them exciting and had loved the films. She said that his oral vocabulary was extensive and that he had a creative mind but did not seem able to transfer his ideas to paper. She went on to say that she was reminded of a pupil that the consultant had worked with the previous year and that she had undertaken some of the preliminary assessments the consultant had done with that pupil, such as asking him to recite days of the week forwards and backwards, sequences of numbers forwards and backwards and so on. She said that she had also looked at his books</p>	<p>This demonstrates that transference of skills, a feature of consultation that supports the notion of capacity building, has occurred (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989).</p>
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<p>and that he did a lot of reversals in his writing of both letters and numbers and that this had seemed similar to some of the concerns the consultant had raised with this other pupil. The consultant said that this was really useful information and that she would definitely want to arrange an in-class observation and some time to do some direct assessment. The consultee said that she was relieved about that because she was very worried about this pupil.</p> <p>The consultant then suggested that they set some objectives for the consultation and asked the consultee what her expectations were. The consultee said that she wanted (pupil) assessed for dyslexia. The consultant said that she understood why she had focused on that but asked if it was the most appropriate objective. She said “Would it be better to be focusing on tangible learning outcomes rather than a label? We’ll definitely be investigating</p>	<p>The consultee smiled and nodded her head at the consultant’s implicit praise.</p> <p>The use of the word ‘relieved’ made me wonder if the consultee had been expecting to have to convince the consultant to take her concerns and opinion seriously, which in turn raises questions about the true nature of the partnership.</p> <p>The consultee did not show any hesitation in her expectations, which focused on a diagnosis and were thus clearly rooted in a medical model of inclusion (Mason, 1992). The consultant’s response, which was clearly intended to broaden the focus of the consultation and locate it in learning outcomes rather than diagnosis, could be ascribed to a social model (Mason,1992) and was an interesting insight into their respective pedagogies which will always be</p>
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<p>dyslexia but the bottom line is that we want pupil Z to be making progress in literacy, whether we call that difficulty dyslexia or something else. So, would it be better to have objectives that focus on him making progress rather than on giving a name to his difficulty? I'd be happier with that. What do you think?" The consultee agreed, but said that she definitely wanted dyslexia to be investigated. The consultant said that was absolutely fine, but then said "What difference do you want to see for pupil Z? What will progress look like?" The consultee said that she wanted to ensure that pupil Z's needs were properly assessed so that he would not fall any further behind his peers and would be in a better position to cope at secondary school. The consultant said that was very important but she said "Let's think about what his needs being met will look like. Will it be making progress in reading?" The consultee agreed that it would and the consultant then said "What will that progress look like? How will we know that progress has been achieved?"</p>	<p>present in their consultations but not always as overtly as in this particular instance. The consultant was very open that she wanted the objectives to focus on progress and not a label, stating "I'd be happier with that". Whilst the consultee agreed with this she also showed that she was determined that the question of dyslexia should be pursued.</p> <p>The consultant returns to the use of solution-focused language, again using her adaptation of the miracle question (de Shazer, 1985).</p> <p>The consultant is persistent in her questioning and probing and continues to work towards the consultee being able to visualise and then articulate what the progress will look like.</p>
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<p>They carried on discussing the outcomes they would work towards, with the consultant using similar questions to try and refine them further and when it seemed that the outcomes had finally been clarified to the consultant's satisfaction she wrote them on to the Consultation Information Form, checking that the consultee was in agreement with the wording. She then asked the consultee if they could review the outcomes at an appropriate point in the future and the consultee agreed.</p> <p>The consultant moved to conclude the consultation, saying "I think we've done well today, but it was made so much easier because you had such good quality information about pupil Z's difficulties. We've been able to clarify the concerns you have about him and we've now agreed the outcomes that we'll be working towards and we're both clear on what that progress will look like. If we can just get our diaries together and get some dates agreed for the next part of my involvement then we'll be done for today". They then went on to book</p>	<p>The consultant continued to show a high degree of persistence as she continued to work on refining the expected outcomes. The consultee remained engaged in the process although she did display some slight irritation by slouching a bit in her chair, crossing her arms and stifling a yawn.</p> <p>The consultant's concluding statement used the word 'we' in some form seven times in three sentences (we've x3; we'll x2; we're; we). She gave shared praise (".. we've done well today") but attributed this to the consultee (".. you had such good quality information.."). This was a strong reinforcing statement of the collaborative nature of their practice and was well-received by the consultee who smiled and nodded.</p>
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<p>a time for an in-class observation followed by some direct assessment and a meeting with the parents. The consultant also asked if some time could be arranged for her to meet with the class teacher after the observation so that she could discuss what she had observed and get the views of the teacher as to whether this would have been usual or not, and the consultee said that this would not be a problem and that she would be able to cover for the teacher, as she usually did, in order to enable this meeting to take place. The consultant thanked her for her support.</p> <p>The consultant then briefly summarised the agreed next steps and thanked the consultee for being so well-prepared for the meeting. The consultation was then over and both the consultant and I were escorted back to the reception area to sign out prior to leaving the school.</p>	<p>This demonstrated the on-going nature of their work and the routines that have been established. It also demonstrates the importance of engagement and co-operation by both parties, who have a clear understanding of their respective roles in the process.</p> <p>The recurring theme of thanks.</p>
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4.7 Observation 1 in school 2

In preparation for the first observation at school 2 I followed the same procedure as I had for the four observations in school 1, arriving at the school fifteen minutes

before the scheduled time for the consultation for the reasons previously explained in 3.17. I was required to sign in at reception and was then escorted by the school receptionist to the room where the consultation was scheduled to take place. The receptionist informed me that the SENCO would join me shortly and then left me in the room. The room to be used was a classroom that was designated as the SEN Resource Base and contained a large number of resources for use with pupils with SEN. It was the SENCO's base, used for her teaching sessions with pupils on the SEN Register and also for meetings with parents and outside agencies. The room was also the base for the school's team of Teaching Assistants who used it to deliver both individual and small group teaching sessions. The room had one large table, used by the SENCO as a desk, and five cluster arrangements of tables, each cluster capable of seating four people. The SENCO arrived after five minutes, saying that the Advisory Teacher would be with us in a further five minutes as she was just finishing some assessment work with another pupil. She asked me how I wished to proceed with the observation. I responded by thanking her for agreeing to participate in the observations. I asked which table she intended using for the consultation, stating that I would sit at an adjoining table in order to be as unobtrusive as possible. The SENCO then said that she needed to gather some paperwork for the consultation and went to her 'desk', giving me the opportunity to get myself settled and ready for taking the field notes of the observation. The Advisory Teacher consultee came into the room a few minutes later.

Results	Comments and discussion
<p>As soon as the Advisory Teacher consultant entered the room the SENCO consultee asked her how the work with the other pupil had progressed, and they spoke about that piece of casework for a few minutes. The SENCO consultee then said, "Right. To business then. Let's have a look at pupil (name) and see how you can support us to address her learning needs. Did you get the Consultation Information Form? I asked the secretary to post it to you last week".</p> <p>The consultant replied that she had received the form and thanked her for posting it. She then began to summarise the concerns, saying that this was a Year 3 pupil for whom the class teacher had had concerns since she transitioned to Key Stage 2, and that her class teacher in Year 2 had also been concerned about her slow progress in literacy and had placed her at School Action. She said "The purpose of this consultation seems to be to look at how we can address her literacy difficulties and</p>	<p>The consultee took control of the consultation immediately and it appeared, by her choice of language, (".. see how you can support us..") that her understanding of the consultant's role was of someone who would be coming with answers to her questions and concerns as per the expert and directional relationship (Erchul, 1992).</p> <p>This consultant, unlike the consultant observed in school 1, thanked the consultee for completing and posting the form but, unlike her consultant colleague who was observed in School 1 observations, she did not thank her for raising the pupil for consultation. She was less effusive than her consultant colleague and my initial impression was that she was more reserved and contained in her manner. Her use of language was rather formal, as evidenced by the question 'Is</p>

<p>also to determine if she should be moved to School Action Plus. Is that an accurate statement?" The consultee agreed that it was, adding that her difficulties are long-standing, the school have now done all that they can and she wanted her moved to School Action Plus and wanted input from the Advisory Teacher (consultant) to advise on programmes and interventions for the class teacher to implement. The consultant then asked the consultee to expand a bit on the information she had provided, asking if she could give some more details about the small group teaching sessions she had referred to on the form. The consultee spoke in some detail about the pupil's progress in literacy in Key Stage 1 where the main intervention had been ReadWriteInc. The consultee outlined the Teaching Assistant led small group sessions the pupil had received and the fact that she seemed to make progress on one day but then to have forgotten everything by the next session. The consultee said that she is operating at NC level 1c for reading and has not made any progress for two</p>	<p>that an accurate statement?', and as an observer I found it to be somewhat challenging and not the choice of words I would expect to be used between partners.</p> <p>Another reference here by the consultee to the expert and directional relationship (Erchul, 1992).</p>
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<p>terms since moving to Year 3, despite the continuation of small group support, other interventions and mother's support via daily reading practice at home.</p> <p>The consultant then said that to finish Key Stage 1 at 1c would not be a major cause for concern and that she was probably appropriately placed at School Action at that point in time. She went on to say that as she has not made any progress at all since transition to Key Stage 2 then it is definitely time to have a closer look at what is happening and to determine if she should now be placed at School Action Plus. The consultant said that she would like to observe the pupil in the classroom and also in one of the Teaching Assistant led intervention sessions. She also said that she would like to meet with the teacher and Teaching Assistant briefly after the observations, either together or separately, in order to discuss her observations and gather their perceptions and she asked the consultee if that would be alright. The consultee said that the observations would</p>	<p>The phrase 'not a major cause for concern' sounded somewhat dismissive. She went on to acknowledge the consultee's concerns but this phrasing did not enhance the collaborative framework expected of the consultation process.</p> <p>The consultant was adopting a solution-focused approach here but the consultee's</p>
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<p>be fine and that she wanted the dates to be agreed as soon as possible. She then said that it might prove difficult for the teacher and Teaching Assistant to be released for a discussion but that she would see what she could do. The consultant said that they would agree dates before she left and she asked if the consultee would be able to cover the teacher and/or Teaching Assistant to enable her to have a conversation. The consultee said it was unlikely as she has a full timetable but she would see if she could arrange it. She said if she was not able to then perhaps the consultant could come after school to have her discussion. The consultant replied that these conversations would be important to the process and that she would wait to hear from the consultee to see what she had been able to arrange.</p> <p>She then asked what intervention programme was currently being implemented by the Teaching Assistant. On being told that it was ReadWriteInc, she asked why they were continuing with a</p>	<p>response suggested resistance (Jordan, 1994). It was also interesting to note that she was stating how busy she was but at the same time assuming that the consultant would not have other appointments and would be able to return after school on another date. Also, Teaching Assistants in this school work school opening times only so would not be available to meet after the school day unless it was through their own 'goodwill'.</p> <p>This was a valid and pertinent question but</p>
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<p>programme in Year 3 that had not delivered progress in Year 2. The consultee said that it was a proven programme and that some children take longer than others to make progress and so their policy is to continue the programme in to Year 3 for any children who were not yet reading fluently. The consultant replied that as the pupil has not made any progress for over two terms then it is now time to look more flexibly at a wider range of interventions in order to start to narrow the gap between this pupil and her peers. Without a pause the consultant then said, "Ok. Let's be clear about the focus of this consultation and agree the objectives. What would you like us to achieve at the end of the consultation process?" The consultee looked visibly annoyed at this point, as evidenced by her change of facial expression, and she replied "Well obviously I want her (pupil) to make progress with her literacy and for this progress to be seen in her National Curriculum levels. I want you to do some assessment in order to diagnose the nature of her difficulties and then to give us clear</p>	<p>it was asked bluntly and in the manner of teacher to pupil rather than of two professionals who were engaging in a collaborative process. The consultant's tone was calm and neutral throughout the consultation but I observed that the consultee's voice was sharper when she responded and she had a severe expression on her face.</p> <p>The phrase "... it is now time to look more flexibly.." implied criticism that the school had not been flexible in their approach to date and I noted that the consultee appeared to be visibly annoyed at this point. The consultant maintained an even tone throughout and her body language was relaxed and she did not appear to be aware of the consultee's annoyance.</p> <p>The use of the word 'obviously' was an indication of her annoyance.</p> <p>The consultee's expectation of an expert relationship is emerging as a key theme</p>
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<p>guidance on what interventions to use”.</p> <p>The consultant replied, “Would it be better to be focusing on learning outcomes rather than thinking about a diagnosis? We are not medics and ideally this consultation should form part of your Assessment for Learning practices and that locates it in a framework of analysis, plan, do and review that should support pupil progress. Can we think about what pupil progress for this child will look like? Will it be making progress in reading?” The consultee looked very tense and uncomfortable – she was frowning and lightly tapping the table with her pen – but she agreed that it would. The consultant then said “So what will that progress look like? How will we know that progress has been achieved?” The consultee said that she thought she had already made that clear, that progress would be seen in her National Curriculum level for reading. The consultant replied that she understood that, saying, “We will definitely expect to see progress against National Curriculum levels, I agree, but that is a longer term</p>	<p>(Erchul, 1992).</p> <p>The consultant’s statement “we are not medics..” sounded curt. She maintained an even tone and expression but this statement could perhaps have been softened and sounded less dismissive if it had been delivered with a smile. By going on to describe the principles of Assessment for Learning she was also, whether consciously or otherwise, suggesting that the consultee was less familiar with these principles and needed a reminder. Again, this did nothing to enhance a collaborative partnership process. The consultee had started the meeting rather officiously, almost in the role of ‘chair’ and she now appeared to be very discomfited to be in the position of having to answer some challenging and searching questions.</p> <p>The consultant used a solution-focused approach to probe and refine the objectives but due to the language used it felt more</p>
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<p>objective. Think more immediately. What else will progress look like?" The consultant continued with this questioning, probing and clarifying what progress would 'look like'. She used solution-focused language throughout, and was persistent in asking the consultee to clarify what progress for this pupil would look like.</p> <p>When the outcomes had been clarified to the consultant's satisfaction she wrote them on to the Consultation Information Form, checking that the consultee was in agreement with the wording. The consultee said "Yes, but I'm far more interested in what you're going to do than with the semantics of objectives. Can we talk about the practicalities now? I am very busy today and I need to know what you are going to do and when. I want this work to start as soon as possible and I would like you back in school as early as possible."</p> <p>The consultant replied that she was pleased that they had been able to clarify the concerns for the pupil and been able to</p>	<p>challenging than it had when used by the consultant in School 1. The sentence "Think more immediately" sounded like an order and kept the consultant firmly in the senior partner role. The consultee participated reluctantly with this process of refining the agreed outcomes. She looked cross and irritated and during this stage of the consultation she gave the consultant intense eye contact, although the consultant's tone of voice and facial expression did not change at all. As an observer I was aware of tension in the room and I felt slightly uncomfortable. The consultant's manner did not change at all, not even when the consultee verbalised her irritation, wanting to move from 'semantics' to 'practicalities'.</p>
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<p>agree the consultation objectives that they will be working towards, saying that they are both clear now on what that progress will look like. She said, "I realise that you've found this part of the discussion a bit frustrating but it is important for us both to be absolutely clear about what we're trying to achieve. Now, shall we get our diaries together and get some dates agreed for the next part of my involvement. I want to arrange the two observations we discussed and, following the second observation, some time to do some one-to-one work with (pupil). I can do all this in one session if you like, as I'm aware that you want to move swiftly with (pupil). How does 22nd May sound to you? Once we've got the dates sorted I'll be finished for today, then we can just summarise and agree our next steps. I know you're busy too and need to get on".</p> <p>The consultee said she would like an earlier date than the one offered, and they then spent several minutes talking about date options, which were limited on the part of the consultant. They then went on to book a time, which was the date offered earlier by</p>	<p>It was very interesting to see that the consultant was aware of the consultee's annoyance and that she acknowledged it, as she had not shown any sign of this in her own body language. She was very much in control of the process here, justifying her persistence in agreeing objectives and, unlike the consultee, betraying no emotions of irritation or impatience. She did, however, acknowledge the consultee's desire to progress this work quickly and was prepared to accommodate this.</p> <p>The consultant acknowledged the consultee's desire to end the session but it felt as if this show of empathy was too little too late and the session ended rather abruptly and with little evidence of partnership working.</p>
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<p>the consultant. The consultant then thanked the consultee for her time today and started to say something else which I think was to be about 'next steps' but the consultee stood up, saying that the meeting had taken longer than she had expected and that she needed to get back to her class. She said goodbye and left the room.</p>	
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4.8 Observation 2 in School 2

In preparation for the second observation at school 2 I followed the same procedure as previously, arriving at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for the consultation for the reasons previously explained in 3.17. Once again I was required to sign in at reception and I was then escorted by the school receptionist to the SEN Resource Base room where the consultation was again scheduled to take place. The receptionist informed me that the Advisory Teacher had not arrived yet and that the SENCO would join me shortly and then left me in the room. I assumed that the same tables would be used and positioned myself accordingly. The SENCO and the Advisory Teacher came in to the room together five minutes later. They both greeted me and then sat at the table to begin the consultation session.

Results	Comments and Discussion
<p>The SENCO consultee and Advisory Teacher consultant were not speaking as they entered the room. They each took their places at the table they had sat at for the previous consultation meeting, the consultant removing some paperwork from her bag and the consultee carrying a pupil file. They took a few minutes to organise themselves and then both started to talk at the same time. They both smiled and the consultant told the consultee to go ahead. The consultee immediately said that she only had twenty minutes for the consultation as she had to cover a member of staff who was absent. The consultant said “Don’t worry, we can book another time if we need to but it’s amazing what can be done in twenty minutes.” The consultee did not respond to this and went on to say that she had very significant concerns about the school’s ability to support ‘pupil’ (focus of the consultation) and that is why they had raised him for consultation. She went on to say, “As you already know, he is at School Action Plus and you were involved in</p>	<p>I had the impression that a formal business meeting was about to commence. The two participants did not engage in any preliminary chat but the atmosphere did not feel tense or uncomfortable.</p> <p>Both were prepared to take the lead role at the start of the consultation. The consultant’s smile and relaxed body language suggested that she was unconcerned about who initiated the discussion. The consultant also looked relaxed about the short time frame that was available.</p> <p>This pupil had been the subject of prior consultation involving both parties. This had taken place around eight months</p>

<p>consultation at the start of Year 3 following his transition from KS1. We have followed your suggestions but his behaviour is of great concern and we don't think we can meet his needs here. We will be raising him with the EP (Educational Psychologist) in September for statutory assessment. She (EP) has no sessions left this year so I thought we should involve you again to see if there is anything else you can suggest. We may have to carry out a fixed term exclusion and we want to be certain that parents will not be able to say that we have not tried everything possible."</p> <p>The consultant said that she remembered the pupil well and had been impressed by how proactive the school had been in planning for the transition from KS1 to KS2, and she then asked the consultee what the current performance levels were, to which the consultee replied, "I've given you that data on the form, didn't you receive it?" The consultant did not respond to this but asked the consultee to talk through the particular difficulties that they were now experiencing,</p>	<p>previously. The consultee acknowledges that "suggestions" were made by the consultant and goes on to state that the school will now be seeking consultation with the EP in September (this observed consultation took place in June). The comment clearly implies that further consultation is only being requested by this consultant because the EP cannot become involved until September. I perceived this to be professionally discourteous, whether intentionally or not, as it implied that the consultation today is merely a temporary measure until the EP can become involved. This was further compounded by the comment about fixed term exclusion as that implied that the purpose of the consultation is to act as a salve to parents should the school decide that an exclusion is appropriate. The consultant did not show any sign, verbal or otherwise, of being irritated or annoyed by these comments.</p>
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<p>outlining the strategies they had been implementing.</p> <p>The consultee sighed loudly and said that, as a school, they had tried extremely hard but the pupil's behaviour was sometimes violent and out-of-control and that there was nothing else they could do. She went on to say that a Teaching Assistant had been kicked and bitten and was threatening to resign, and that other parents were now starting to complain that their children were afraid of him and some had said that their children did not want to come to school.</p> <p>She said, "We have done everything. The Head is very concerned, so are the Governors. He needs a statement and should probably be in a special school. No other school would do as much as we have done. The Head, deputy or I get called to that class at least once a day because of his behaviour and he is taking up too much time. It stops us doing other things. The Head wanted to be here today himself for this meeting but he had to go out of school for another meeting. The deputy will join us</p>	<p>The consultee's sigh suggested irritation at being asked to give more detail about her concerns.</p> <p>The phrase "we have done everything" has already been repeated several times and suggests that the consultee is looking for total agreement with the school's views from the consultant but not any suggestions for further actions for the school to undertake. The phrase "he is taking up too much time" is particularly telling and would be unlikely to be used if parents were present. The mention of the Head and deputy seemed to be intended to add weight to the school's concerns but,</p>
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<p>if she can but she's on cover today so may not be able to make it. We're at the end of our tether and not very pleased that J (the school's Educational Psychologist) told us that we had no sessions left and we would have to wait until September for her to get involved. We need help now, or else we will have no choice but to exclude him."</p> <p>The consultant responded by saying that she could tell that the school felt that they were in a critical situation and that the situation was out of their control. She said that she understood that they felt that they were unable to move things on at the present time but she would like to discuss in more detail what precisely had been happening and what interventions had been put in place following her consultation in September. She said that it was "absolutely unacceptable" for a member of staff to be kicked and bitten. She then went on to say that they had to be very mindful of the fact that this pupil had a diagnosis of autism and they had to be sure that all reasonable</p>	<p>perhaps more potently, to put pressure on the consultant to understand that the school were united in their message of 'enough'.</p> <p>The consultee is again telling the consultant, perhaps unintentionally, that she is the 'second best' choice for consultation at this time. The consultant appeared outwardly calm and unmoved by these comments.</p> <p>The consultant employed empathy and showed that she had been actively listening to the concerns raised by the consultee. She also used unequivocal language to express her agreement for the fact that a member of staff should not be subjected to physical aggression. This was quickly tempered by her reminder that the pupil in question had a diagnosis of autism. This was particularly interesting to me as an observer because, up to this point in the discussion, I was unaware that the pupil being discussed had autism and had been under the impression that a pupil with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties was being discussed.</p>
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<p>adjustments had been made. “As you know”, the consultant said, “he is not merely misbehaving. He has a recognised disability and as such, his behaviour has to be managed differently wherever appropriate. It is therefore very important that we look at the situation very carefully and see if we can identify any pressure points for him and see if there is any way that different strategies might bring about a different response. Can we go back to when things started to go wrong? When was this, were you able to identify any triggers and, if so, what were the school’s responses to these triggers?”</p> <p>The consultee sighed again and began to look irritated. She said that as a school they had done all that they could reasonably be expected to do. She said that the pupil was “suffering” educationally now because he should really be in a specialist setting that could meet his needs. She said that the parents also realised that he was not in the most appropriate provision to meet his needs and they needed to “fast-track” him</p>	<p>The consultant was repeating her request for the information she had asked for earlier.</p> <p>The consultee was repeating her view that there was nothing else that the school could “be expected to do”. This was interesting language as it implied that the school would not be implementing any other strategies or interventions by choice and would only engage in additional interventions if it was deemed ‘reasonable’ by others. My assumption was that the consultant was</p>
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<p>for a statement.</p> <p>The consultant replied by saying that the school can make a request for a statutory assessment at any time if they feel that they have sufficient evidence. She said that they are aware that they need a minimum of two IEPs (Individual Education Plans) and reviews, together with evidence of outside agency involvement showing their implementation of any recommendations made. She said that they have had consultation from herself and the Consultation Record shows a range of agreed actions. If the school feel strongly that they have the evidence to make a request for a statutory assessment then they should do so. She then said that she thought that the purpose of today's meeting was to review the situation and to see if there was any additional advice she could offer through consultation that could help to improve things. She asked if that was what the consultee wanted or whether they should move on to discuss a different piece of work. She said, "I understand that it is</p>	<p>placed in the group of 'others'.</p> <p>The consultant maintained a stance of neutrality here, neither supporting a request for a statutory assessment but not opposing it either. She reminded the consultee of the process involved whilst at the same time reminding her that she must use her own professional judgement.</p> <p>As an observer I felt that the consultant moved in to senior partner mode at this point. Her tone of voice and facial expression remained the same, calm and even, but she seemed to adopt a very no-nonsense attitude that was effectively saying 'are you serious about wanting consultation or not?' Her senior partner role was at its' most apparent when she</p>
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<p>helpful sometimes to have a broad discussion about a pupil, or a catch-up discussion, but if the situation is as critical as it sounds, with school considering fixed term exclusions and an application for a statement, then I think that it is a time for reviewing the situation in some detail and agreeing next steps rather than having broad discussions. If you want me to be involved then we will need to review the school's interventions in some detail so that we can see if there is any more that can be done at School Action Plus."</p> <p>The consultee looked annoyed and did not answer straight away. She looked away, crossed her arms and bit her lip. The consultant did not say anything else but maintained eye contact and a facial expression that could best be described as neutral. I was aware of a tension in the room and, although the consultee spoke after about ninety seconds, the period of silence was uncomfortable and felt a lot longer. The consultee said, "I do want to discuss (pupil). As a school we want to do</p>	<p>challenged the consultee, albeit in a non-confrontational way, to either engage in the consultation in a meaningful way or move on to something else. Her use of language was challenging the consultee to make a decision as to the purpose of the meeting.</p> <p>My impression at this point was that the consultee was annoyed because the consultant, whilst acknowledging the serious nature of the concerns being raised, was not prepared to merely listen. I felt that the consultee did not expect nor want to discuss the situation with the pupil in any detail, nor did she seem keen to have to consider the possibility of implementing further interventions.</p>
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<p>the best for him. The situation is extremely difficult and stressful for us, as I have tried to explain to you, but we do want the best for (pupil). We just do not feel as a school that we can do any more for him because he needs specialist support and we cannot provide that in a mainstream setting. His difficulties are very severe and it is not fair on the other pupils because everything has to be geared around his needs and the other pupils are suffering as a result. A statement will ensure that his needs are met in the most appropriate setting for him.”</p> <p>The consultant had been maintaining eye contact with the consultee whilst she was speaking, and she also nodded and gave non-verbal encouragement by her serious but concerned facial expression. She then repeated what she had said earlier about needing to review what the school had been doing to support the pupil in order to try and identify the “stress triggers” for the pupil and see what other strategies may be useful to try. She asked the consultee to tell her exactly when things started to break</p>	<p>The consultee repeats again that the school have done everything they can. At this point she is not only considering a statutory assessment but has also pre-empted the outcome of such a request, stating that his needs cannot be met in mainstream provision.</p> <p>The consultant continued to practice active listening but demonstrated persistence in the way that she brought the discussion back to a detailed discussion of what the school had been doing to try and support the pupil in question.</p>
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<p>down and what strategies they had been implementing to support the pupil.</p> <p>The consultee appeared to take a deep breath and she then started to describe the situation. She seemed a bit deflated at this point, her voice was less animated and she gave less eye contact to the consultant than previously. She stated that the class teacher had put a visual time-table in place in the classroom and had tried to implement a work-station approach. She said that the pupil could not concentrate for more than five minutes at a time and did not like working with the Teaching Assistant. She said that if he could not do the work or did not like the activity then he would wander round the classroom or hide under the table and not come out. She said that sometimes he screamed in the classroom for no apparent reason and once he started they could not get him to stop. This behaviour frightened the other children and alarmed the teacher. She went on to say that he was usually on his own at play time because he did not like joining the games that the boys</p>	<p>The consultee appeared resigned to the fact that the consultant was going to persist with the same questions. She suddenly seemed to lack energy and gave the impression of someone who was caught up in a situation she did not want to be in.</p> <p>The consultant made occasional notes whilst the consultee was speaking.</p>
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<p>played and that he regularly had “meltdowns” in the dining hall and this brought lots of complaints from the lunchtime supervisors. In terms of literacy and maths she reported that he was making slow progress, having made one sub-level progress this academic year, but this was only due to the “extensive” amount of Teaching Assistant time that they gave him and which she said was in excess of what should be expected at School Action Plus.</p> <p>She summed up by saying that, despite their best efforts, he was obviously not happy or succeeding at the school, lacking both meaningful friendships with his peers and a sense of belonging to the school community. She then sat back in her chair and looked expectantly at the consultant.</p> <p>The consultant said, “That does sound like a very challenging situation for both you and for (pupil). Earlier you mentioned that he had bitten and kicked a Teaching Assistant. Can you tell me a bit more about</p>	<p>The consultant did not interrupt whilst the consultee was speaking, but continued to show that she was attending by maintaining eye contact, nodding and saying ‘yes’, ‘really’ or ‘mm’ on several occasions. There was an element of challenge in the consultee’s manner at this point, as if she was saying to the consultant ‘what can you advise now?’</p> <p>The consultant showed no sign of having perceived any element of challenge, maintaining an even tone and relaxed body language.</p>
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<p>that?"</p> <p>The consultee replied that the pupil seems to find literacy particularly difficult and does not engage well in group work. She said that a Teaching assistant is deployed to support him in literacy and when she was working with him in a small group of four he covered his ears and refused to start the task. When the Teaching Assistant had handed him his pencil to start writing he kicked her. She said "(pupil), stop" loudly and he then jumped up and bit her on the arm. He then ran across the room to the table where his work station is and hid underneath it and refused to come out. His mother was phoned and asked to come in to school and take him home for the rest of the day.</p> <p>The consultant had again listened without interrupting. She nodded as the consultee finished speaking and said that she can see why the school are concerned as the situation with this pupil is clearly difficult. She said that she thought that some of the concerns and behaviours sounded similar</p>	<p>At this point the consultee seemed to become a bit more energised. Her voice became slightly more animated and she gave more eye contact.</p> <p>A further example of empathy by the consultant.</p>
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<p>to those discussed at the first consultation session in September, so it might be helpful to review the agreed actions from that consultation and discuss how effective they had been. She produced a copy of the Consultation Record she had written for the school following the consultation in the Autumn Term from her bag, and turned to the section headed 'Agreed Actions'. The first agreed action had been the use of a visual timetable and the consultant said that the consultee had said that was being used, but asked if she sure that it was being used consistently. The consultee said that it was.</p> <p>The consultant said "that is good" and then asked if the pupil was actively involved in its' use and either moved the marker himself or was shown that the marker was being moved. The consultee said that she was not sure but she knew it was being used. The consultant asked where it was displayed in the classroom and the consultee said she thought it was under the whiteboard. The consultant then said that the next agreed action had been to</p>	<p>The consultant gave praise but again showed a level of persistence in the questions she asked. She did not at this point highlight or challenge the consultee's uncertainty over some key points re the use of the visual time-table.</p>
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<p>implement a workstation approach and that the consultee had referred to it earlier. She asked where in the classroom it was located and the consultee said it was near the book corner. The consultant said she was not sure that was the best location as that would be near the windows to the playground and would not provide the low sensory stimulation that was the purpose of the workstation. She then asked why the workstation was not used for literacy tasks, saying that if this was an area of particular difficulty for the pupil then the workstation would reduce stress and be preferable to working in a group of four. She asked if the Teaching Assistant had received training in the use of a workstation and the consultee said she thought so but would need to check. The consultant then went on to say that the next agreed action was related to the dining hall. She said that she had recommended that (pupil) always went in to dinner first so he did not have to queue, as they knew from KS1 staff that he could not cope with that, and also so that he could finish and leave before the dining room got</p>	<p>The consultant's criticism of the placement of the workstation was quite covert in that she was said she was 'not sure' rather than stating overtly that it was in an inappropriate location.</p> <p>At this point the consultee was beginning to both look and sound less confident. Her responses began to be a bit hesitant.</p>
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<p>too noisy. They had agreed that he would always eat at a particular table, sitting at the end of the table to reduce the sensory overload of other children and the noise of the room. She asked if that had been happening and the consultee said that she was not sure because she was very busy and could not go in to the dining room every day. The consultant replied that she understood how busy she is that but it was important to know that the agreed strategies were being implemented consistently. The consultee did not respond.</p>	<p>The consultee's response was very defensive at this point. The consultant stayed in senior partner mode with the implied criticism that the consultee was not following through, as part of her SENCO role, to ensure that the agreed strategies were being implemented.</p>
<p>The consultant then asked if the consultee had carried out any monitoring of this pupil in terms of any observations. The consultee said that she had not and that it was very difficult because she did not get a great deal of "dedicated" SENCO time. The consultant replied that she understood the pressures, saying that there is never enough time to carry out all the demands of the SENCO role, but that she thinks that one of the key tasks to try and make time</p>	<p>There was implied criticism here that the consultee was merely repeating the concerns of others rather than having seen the situation for herself and having offered some support for the class teacher and Teaching Assistant. The consultant did acknowledge the demands of the SENCO role but was nonetheless stressing the importance of the monitoring element of the role. The criticism of the consultee became more explicit when the consultant explained</p>

<p>for is monitoring. She went on to say that if things are breaking down for a pupil then it is particularly important to find time to monitor so as to be certain that everything that should be in place is in place. She then said that she would like to do another observation but that she would like, if at all possible, that they do it together. She said that she wants to be certain that the agreed actions are in place consistently before seeing if there are other interventions that could be implemented. She said she realised that two extra bodies in the classroom could be unsettling for the pupil so perhaps she should do a brief classroom observation on her own before lunch and they could then do a joint observation in the dining hall. She asked the consultee what she thought of that.</p> <p>The consultee replied that the pupil needs a statement and more observations will just delay that. The consultant replied by saying that the statementing process takes twenty six weeks in total, the school had not yet put in a request for a statutory assessment,</p>	<p>why it is important to monitor, as an experienced SENCO would be expected to understand the importance of this part of their role, and at this point the consultee did not even seem to be a junior partner but was more in the role of pupil.</p> <p>Implicit criticism here from the consultant.</p> <p>The consultant appeared to be setting up a modelling and coaching experience here.</p> <p>The consultee's purpose in requesting this consultation is again in question by this comment. The consultee is showing quite clearly here that she is not interested in consultation per se but only in something that will be of use in achieving the goal of a</p>
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<p>but the pupil still needs to be supported.</p> <p>She went on to say, “You can apply for a statement today but that won’t alter what needs to be done right away for this pupil. And doing this will not affect the outcome of your request. If anything, it will either improve the situation here in school or will give you additional evidence to include with your request, so really it’s a win-win situation, what do you think?”</p> <p>The consultee then said that there is a supply teacher in that class for this half-term so she was not sure how useful an observation would be under those circumstances. The consultant looked at her for a moment before responding by saying that this is a very important piece of information and may have a significant bearing on (pupil’s) behaviour. She said that she definitely wanted to carry out an observation and they then booked a date for the in-class observation for the following week.</p> <p>The consultation was then concluded. The</p>	<p>statutory assessment. The consultant was not fazed by this response but used it as an opportunity to challenge the consultee as to her next steps.</p> <p>It was evident that the consultant was surprised that the consultee had not shared what she considered to be an important piece of information and I had the impression that the pause before her response was to enable her to measure what she was about to say. However, her challenge was ultimately effective in that she was able to arrange the observations that she had recommended.</p>
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<p>consultant then said that it was unfortunate that the deputy had not been able to join them for part of the consultation but she was sure that the consultee would feedback. She said that when she was in the following week she would be happy to meet with the Head and/or deputy if they wished. She went on to say that when they have completed the observations and are ready to fully review how the agreed actions have been implemented, as well as agreeing future next steps, then the participation of the Head and/or deputy would be particularly important. The consultant also said that she would update the EP on the consultation so that she was fully briefed prior to her involvement in September. She thanked the consultee for her time today and then left.</p>	<p>The consultant was ending the consultation in a position of total control. The consultee looked somewhat bemused at the end of the consultation. This was perhaps because she did not appear to have wanted any outcomes from the consultation other than to be able to say/record that a consultation had taken place, and yet the consultation had ended with clear actions for both parties.</p>
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4.9 Observation 3 in School 2

The third observation at school 2 took place in the first half of the Autumn Term and involved the same consultee but a different consultant for the reasons described in 3.18. In preparation for this observation I again arrived at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for the reasons previously explained.

Once again I was required to sign in at reception and the school receptionist then took me to the SEN Resource Base room where the consultation was again scheduled to take place. The receptionist informed me that the SENCO was teaching and would be with me as soon as possible and then left me in the room. Again, I assumed that the same tables would be used and positioned myself accordingly. The SENCO consultee arrived first and was followed after a few minutes by the Advisory Teacher consultant. Greetings were exchanged and they then sat at the table to begin the consultation session.

Results	Comments and Discussion
<p>The consultant started by saying that she was looking forward to working closely with the school. She thanked the consultee for requesting further consultation on this pupil, noting that the pupil had previously been raised for consultation at the start of Year 3 when the previous Advisory Teacher (consultant) had recommended that the pupil was moved to School Action Plus. She said that she noted that the pupil enjoys school and is a friendly and popular member of the class who responds well to praise. She went on to say that the main concern in Year 3 related to a lack of confidence in reading and slow progress in</p>	<p>The consultant was positive and engaging at the start of the consultation.</p>

<p>writing. The pupil had ended Key Stage 1 with a 1b for reading and a 1a for writing so started Key Sate 2 roughly one level below age-related expectations. The main input in Key Stage 1 had been RML, and school reported that they had to use some distraction techniques to keep her on task. She went on to say that the consultation objectives at the time were 'to improve reading' and 'to improve writing' and that mum said that she wanted her to have extra help.</p> <p>The consultant then said that the previous Advisory Teacher (consultant) had completed some work which she had summarised in a written Consultation Record which, as well as recommending a move to School Action Plus, included a number of agreed actions linked to reading, spelling and writing. She said that, after two terms, school have now requested further consultation and that she would find it really useful if she could get a clear picture of the current situation. She then said, "Can you update me now, focusing on the additional</p>	<p></p> <p>The consultee was paying attention and giving non-verbal responses such as nodding.</p> <p>The consultant smiled as she made this request and looked at the consultee in a</p>
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<p>support she has been having at School Action Plus and anything else you think is relevant?”</p> <p>The consultee replied that parents had taken the pupil to the Specialist Orthoptic Clinic and had been given orange coloured overlays to trial. She may in future have glasses with orange tints. She said that mum is really happy with the progress made in school and the support that had been provided. She said that (pupil) seems to be trying harder in all subjects now and her handwriting is now “spaced and joined”. She went on to say that (pupil) had achieved two of her three IEP targets but had not achieved the “memory target”. She said that she now wants further consultation in order to maintain the progress made and to support her memory difficulties. Also, following the orthoptic appointment, she wants to know whether (pupil) is dyslexic or</p>	<p>way that could be described as ‘encouraging’. The consultee gave eye contact whilst the consultant was speaking and she appeared to be engaging with the process. At this point, the consultation seemed to be very much a meeting of partners, with neither taking a dominant or more senior role.</p> <p>The consultant was now the one who was listening and prompting by the use of nods and ‘mmm’ and ‘I see’.</p> <p>The consultee looked at her paperwork and did not give eye contact when she made the comment about dyslexia.</p>
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<p>not.</p> <p>The consultant replied that the orthoptist's recommendation of the use of overlays would suggest a difficulty that may be "specific in nature". She asked if the consultee had received a report or letter from the orthoptist and the consultee said that she had. The consultant said she would like to see that before she goes. She then asked the consultee what her view was in terms of dyslexia. The consultee hesitated before saying that there had not been the "obvious signs such as b/d reversals" but apparently (pupil) had told the orthoptist that she often thought the letters looked jumbled. She said she was not sure but would like some assessment and some advice as to the next steps.</p> <p>The consultant said, "Let's see if we can clarify the objectives of the consultation. If I've understood properly, you're saying you would like some clarification as to whether (pupil) has dyslexia and you would also like some additional work on developing her memory. Is that right?"</p>	<p>The consultant did not appear to be perturbed by the query of dyslexia and answered quite readily.</p> <p>It was unclear whether the consultee's hesitation was due to being asked to give her opinion or whether she did not have a firm opinion at this point.</p> <p>The consultee agreed with this summary but she said she would also want to ensure that (pupil's) progress is maintained.</p>
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<p>The consultant said that was important, adding that as (pupil) had made such pleasing progress in these areas that it was vital that this was maintained.</p> <p>The Consultee then said that it was “refreshing” to have a consultation meeting where the Advisory Teacher (consultee) was willing to do what was asked and also to give a diagnosis of dyslexia, as it is well known that X Authority does not recognise dyslexia. The consultant replied without a pause to say that X Local Authority does recognise dyslexia and has done so since 1984 so she does not understand that comment. She then said, “I had a look through the Inclusion Meeting Minutes for the last academic year before coming here today and I noted that you have always recorded that you were happy with the support you have received from both your Advisory Teacher and your Ed Psych. If that is not the case then it is something that needs to be addressed but that is not my role. Would you like me to raise this with my</p>	<p>The consultee smiled broadly at this point.</p> <p>The consultant’s facial expression was stern and her tone of voice could best be described as ‘cold’ at this point. She had moved swiftly into the role of ‘defender’ of her ex-colleague and it was clear that she was not prepared to listen to any pejorative comments without challenging them. She made it clear by her choice of words that she was not prepared to engage in a discussion at this level but neither was she</p>
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<p>line manager so that she can contact you and you can discuss your concerns?”</p> <p>The consultant did not pause after the consultee had said ‘no’ but went straight on to outline her proposed next steps, which included a 1:1 session with the pupil during which she would carry out some standardised assessments, including a phonological assessment. She said that she would like to meet with parents to get their perspective, if that could be arranged, and that she would summarise her involvement in a written Consultation Record in which she would give a recommendation of how best to describe (pupil’s) difficulties for the purposes of PLASC identification. She said that any other recommendations she made would be discussed with the SENCO (consultee) prior to including them in her record, and that was to ensure that they were “agreed actions” that the school would be able to implement. She asked if that sounded a suitable way forward and had she covered that main areas of concern raised for this</p>	<p>going to ignore what she had just heard.</p> <p>The consultee looked rather embarrassed, blushing and looking flustered, and she muttered “No, no, it’s alright now, I’ll leave it now” when asked by the consultant if she should raise this with her line manager. I had the distinct impression at this point that the consultee had planned to ambush the consultant by making negative comments about the previous consultant and the LA but the ambush had gone wrong when the consultant had challenged her. The consultee did not seem prepared for this challenge and seemed flustered that ‘the tables had been turned’.</p>
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consultation. The consultee replied that this sounded a good way forward.	The consultee did not make any additional comments and I had the impression that she wanted this meeting to be over as quickly as possible.
The consultant then confirmed the date and time for her next visit and the consultation ended. The consultee said that she would escort us both out.	The consultation ended in what I perceived to be a tense manner. Neither party spoke on the way back to reception and their goodbyes were polite but brief.

4.10 Observation 4 in School 2

The fourth observation at school 2 took place in the first half of the Autumn Term and involved the same consultee and consultant as for the third observation. I again arrived at the school fifteen minutes before the scheduled time for the reasons previously explained. Again I was required to sign in at reception and the school receptionist then took me to the SEN Resource Base room where the consultation was again scheduled to take place. I was curious as to how the consultation would proceed given the rather awkward end to the previously observed consultation which had taken place only three weeks previously. I assumed that the same tables would be used and positioned myself accordingly. Both parties arrived together ten minutes later and they were talking about the weather as they came into the room. I did not pick up any tension or awkwardness as they greeted me and took their seats at the table.

Results	Comments and Discussion
<p>Whilst they were still in the act of sitting down the consultant started the conversation. She thanked the consultee for returning a Consultation Information Form, saying that she had received it a couple of days ago and so had had a chance to have a look at it. She said that she understood why the consultee was concerned about this pupil in Year 5 as she did not appear to have made any measurable progress in Year 4, despite the school implementing a range of strategies to try and address her areas of difficulty in literacy and maths. She then asked the consultee to tell her a bit more about her concerns.</p> <p>The consultee then spoke at some length about the pupil's difficulties. In summary, she said that (pupil) had finished Key Stage 1 at 1c for reading, writing and maths but only P8 for speaking and listening. The school had requested involvement from speech therapy who had carried out an assessment and made some</p>	<p>I had the impression that the consultant was determined to be the one to start the discussion. I wondered whether, after the previous consultation, she was perhaps keen to establish herself in a more 'senior partner' role that would maybe ensure that there were no further incidents, such as had happened at their last consultation meeting.</p> <p>The consultant immediately acknowledged the consultee's concerns and the consultee appeared to be quite relaxed at this point, listening and giving eye contact.</p> <p>Although the consultant seemed to take control of the session at the outset, she was quick to involve the consultee.</p>

<p>recommendations for IEP targets.</p> <p>The consultant had been listening and making occasional notes but at this point she interrupted and asked if there was a report from the speech therapist. The consultee said that there was a report in (pupil's) file and that she would get it if the consultant would like to see it. The consultant said that she would like to see it but that they should wait until they had finished their discussion. She then smiled at the consultee and gave the slightest of nods as if to say 'carry on', which the consultant did.</p> <p>The consultee continued by saying that (pupil) is now in Year 5 and operating at 2b in reading, writing and maths and 1c for speaking and listening but has not made any progress in terms of NC levels since end of Year 3. The consultee went on to say that they implemented RML into Year 3 but that in Year 4 they have been implementing Jolly Phonics and Oxford Reading Tree. She said that they have included the pupil in an in-school</p>	<p>This was a subtle gesture but one that conveyed an element of control and dominance of the situation. The consultee seemed to take her cue from the consultant's non-verbal communication and she carried on with her information.</p>
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<p>pragmatics group and have also worked to raise (pupil's) self-esteem but she is now becoming aware of the growing gap between herself and her peers and there are signs of increasing frustration and a reluctance to engage in additional work with the Teaching Assistant. The consultant interrupted again, asking what they have been doing to raise (pupil's) self-esteem, saying "that is quite a difficult thing to do in isolation".</p> <p>The consultee replied by saying that (pupil) is becoming quite skilful at wasting time and delaying the start of tasks. She said (pupil) will ask the Teaching Assistant a lot of questions that are designed to waste time and she will often say that the work is too hard or that she can't do it. She went on to say that on one occasion (pupil) asked why she always had to work with the Teaching Assistant and why she was not able to sit with a different group of pupils, who were more able than her.</p> <p>The consultant then asked how much time (pupil) is spending with the Teaching</p>	<p>At this point the consultant listened without speaking and without giving any non-verbal feedback or encouragement.</p>
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<p>Assistant. The consultee replied that (pupil) works on “the SEN table” with the Teaching Assistant and a few other pupils who are on the SEN register for literacy, maths and most other activities and also has three 1:1 sessions per week with the Teaching Assistant to work on her IEP targets. She then went on to say that the amount of support (pupil) is receiving is in excess of what is required at School Action and that she wants her to be moved to School Action Plus.</p>	<p>The consultant raised her eyebrows slightly at this response but did not say anything. The consultee appeared to notice this as well and she frowned slightly.</p>
<p>The consultant replied by saying that it does sound that the school are implementing a number of strategies. She went on to say that, given (pupil's) age and prior attainment, then a move to School Action Plus would be appropriate. She also said that she was surprised that this pupil had not been raised for consultation during Year 4, adding “but perhaps you did not have any sessions left due to other priorities within the school.”</p>	<p>The consultee seemed to experience a number of emotions in a very short space of time. She smiled slightly when the consultant acknowledged the school's input and then smiled and nodded when the consultant agreed with the move to School Action Plus. She then stopped smiling and looked annoyed when the consultant queried why the pupil had not been raised for consultation in Year 4.</p>
<p>The consultee replied tersely that it is always difficult to prioritise pupils for</p>	<p>Her tone of voice when she replied conveyed irritation and annoyance and she</p>

<p>consultation as the school do not receive sufficient sessions to meet their needs. The consultant nodded and said “Yes, most SENCOs feel the same way. There just aren’t enough sessions to go round.” The consultant then said that she would like them to agree on the objectives of the consultation, saying “What, specifically, do you want us to achieve through this process?”</p> <p>The consultee paused for a moment and then said, “I’m sorry. I thought I’d explained our concerns. (Pupil) is way behind her peers and the gap is widening. As a school we have been putting in a lot of additional support but it is not having sufficient impact. I want you to give us some advice about what we can do to support her progress.”</p> <p>The consultant replied that she understood the “big picture” but she wanted them to be specific now. She said that she knows that they want to see (pupil) making progress in core subjects but that they need to narrow this down. She said, “Let’s try and narrow this down. How are we going to know, in</p>	<p>was seemingly placed in a position of needing to justify or defend her decisions, which effectively placed her in a junior partner role. The consultant’s response seemed somewhat routine and almost dismissive. She did not convey any genuine empathy for the consultee’s situation. There was a slight emphasis on the word ‘specifically’.</p> <p>This was said politely but I had the distinct impression that the consultee was being sarcastic. Her facial expression suggested that this was the case.</p> <p>As she started to speak the consultant gave the slightest of smiles, almost as if she was acknowledging the consultee’s sarcasm. However, her voice was calm when she spoke.</p> <p>She was using solution-focused language</p>
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<p>terms of pupil progress, that we have achieved the consultation objectives? What will the progress look like?”</p> <p>The consultee paused and looked off into space for a few seconds. She then said that she was most concerned about reading, writing and (pupil’s) ability to retain what she has learnt, and that she would like those areas to be the focus of the consultation. The consultant asked a few more probing questions, trying to clarify what progress would look like. The consultee participated with this process of refining the agreed outcomes and this was repeated for three IEP targets. The consultant suggested that one target should focus on developing (pupil’s) working memory and asked the consultee if she agreed. The consultee replied that (pupil’s) retention is definitely a concern and asked what the consultant meant by working memory. The consultant talked about working memory for a few minutes, describing it as the “post-it note”. She said that she would not be surprised if the</p>	<p>at this point, but stopping short of the miracle question (de Shazer, 1985).</p> <p>The consultant used solution-focused language whilst she was trying to agree the consultation objectives. She had to be quite persistent, utilising skills of negotiation. The consultee participated with this process of refining the outcomes but started to look and sound a bit impatient after two or three questions. The consultant picked up on this and moved on to the other targets.</p> <p>The consultee asked the question but did not sound as if she was particularly interested in the answer. She seemed tired of the session and I had the impression that she wanted it to finish. Her manner</p>
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<p>school could identify a number of pupil's for whom difficulties with working memory was causing a barrier to their learning and progression. She spoke about working memory for a few more minutes and said that she would be able to make some suggestions for specific activities for (pupil) to try and develop their working memory capacity, but that the SENCO might want to consider some school-based training in this area, as that would build the school's capacity and impact on the progress of a number of pupils. The consultee replied that this sounded very interesting and that she would like some more information so that she could discuss it with the Head, with a view to arranging some school-based training. The consultant said she would send her an email with some additional information and the consultee said that would be very helpful. She then asked how much training would cost and the consultant replied that the training could be delivered out of their available sessions at no additional cost. The consultee smiled and asked her to email the information as soon</p>	<p>changed as the consultant elaborated on what she meant by working memory, and she actually sat up a bit straighter in her seat and her facial expression became a bit more animated.</p> <p>The consultee had been showing real interest in what the consultant had been saying and she was now quite animated.</p> <p>The consultee nodded and smiled broadly at this point.</p> <p>The consultee looked very pleased at this point and seemed to be fully engaging in</p>
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<p>as possible.</p> <p>The consultant then said that they need to agree the consultation objectives and record them on the Consultation Information Form. She reiterated that it was important to be clear about the objectives so that they would be able to review the outcomes effectively at an agreed date in the future. She checked that the consultee agreed with the wording, saying that they can set a review date before they finish today.</p> <p>The consultant then started to bring the consultation meeting to its conclusion, saying “Well, I think we’ve done what we set out to do. You’ve really clarified your concerns around this pupil and we’ve managed to agree the outcomes that we’ll be working towards and we’re both clear on what that will look like. If we can just look at what the next steps in the process should be for both of us then I think we’ll be finished.” She then went on to book a time for an in-class observation, asking the</p>	<p>the session and collaborating with the consultant. She now appeared to be a willing participant in the discussion, making a number of suggestions about the objectives and questioning others, whereas earlier she had appeared more reluctant.</p> <p>The consultee was nodding quite vigorously at this point.</p> <p>This was the first time that the word ‘we’ had been used during the consultation when it actually felt like a genuine ‘we’ rather than a forced ‘we’. The participants were behaving like a partnership at this point, although it was still an unequal partnership and seemed to have been achieved because the consultee perceived the consultant to be an ‘expert’ in the area of working memory.</p>
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<p>consultee to liaise with the class teacher re the arrangements. The consultant also asked if some time could be arranged for her to meet with the class teacher after the observation so that she could discuss what she had observed and get the views of the teacher as to whether this would have been usual or not.</p> <p>The consultee agreed to this, and said that she would speak to the Head as soon as possible about the possibility of training and asked the consultant to send her the additional information as soon as possible.</p> <p>The consultant said she would email it by the end of the week, together with details of the activities to be implemented as part of the IEP target.</p> <p>The consultee thanked her for her time and input today, and the consultant said that she had enjoyed the session and that she was hopeful that they would now start to see some sustainable progress for (pupil).</p> <p>The consultation was concluded and the consultee escorted us back to the reception area to sign out.</p>	<p></p> <p>The consultee appeared to be focused on the training that had been offered and was perhaps agreeing to other actions as a means of facilitating the training.</p> <p></p> <p>The 'thanks' appeared genuine and the consultation ended in a very affable manner, particularly when compared to the previous consultation session that had been observed involving these participants.</p>
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS and CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of discussion

The results of the case study, together with some integrated discussion, have been presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter I will seek to present a discussion of these results in greater detail and will search for explanations in the research evidence that will provide a response to my research question, namely:

‘What are the characteristics of an effective consultation process for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teachers support to schools, and what are the characteristics of an ineffective consultation system?’

5.2 Interviews with consultees – introduction of consultation and training

During the interviews all six consultees made some comment and gave their views about how consultation was introduced or described to them, but only consultee 3 makes explicit reference to training or, to be more accurate, to the absence of training. Consultee 1, who overall presents as a consultee who is satisfied with the process but who is passive in her participation, states that consultation was “.. introduced to me as a different way of working..” Consultee 2, whose participation presents as more active than passive, stated that consultation “..was described as a process we would embark on together” whereas consultee 4, who presents as having a grudging acceptance of the process, stated that consultation “.. was described as a different way of working..” Consultee 5 stated that “I was

told that it would mean that we would be working more closely together than we would have done under the previous referral system” and consultee 6 stated that “We were told that consultation was about working more effectively with schools” and also that “..consultation was designed to support capacity building rather than dependency.” This latter comment appears to be the only one that sheds any light whatsoever on the philosophy of consultation and what it is trying to achieve. It is interesting to note that consultee 6 is the consultee observed in school 1, the ‘pro-consultation’ school, and yet it is extremely unlikely that the limited level of explanation about the change of philosophy and change of practice would have had any influence on the positive attitude that she has developed.

All the other comments that have been reported are bland and uninformative. They lack both depth and detail and are not the type of comments that would be expected to be given by one professional group to another to explain and inform the rationale behind what was, essentially, a fundamental change in practice. This aspect of the introduction of consultation is indicative of an unequal power relationship right from the start, which would be a characteristic of an ineffective consultation system. However, it can also be noted that consultee 1 in particular is very positive about the system of consultation that she engages in, which would suggest that the consultant for her school has ‘sold’ it well. She was only told that consultation would be “a different way of working” and yet she has adapted well to this changed system and speaks very positively about it. This suggests that the consultant who works with her has very good communication skills, albeit rather under-utilised in terms of explaining the philosophy and pedagogy of the system,

together with, presumably, good technical skills that have resulted in this consultee becoming – without benefit of formal training – such a devotee of consultation.

Consultee 3, who was later observed in school 2, stated “I never went to a training session that explained the philosophy or pedagogy of consultation as a process for the delivery of SEN support. It just sort of happened.” This consultee had had considerable experience, more than five years, of engaging with SEN support services via a referral system, and so it is perhaps not surprising that she had also described herself as “a forced partner,” adding that “It is either this or nothing.” The fact that she had not been offered any training when consultation was introduced or subsequently gives justification and validation to her comment that “It is their process not mine.” It is interesting to note that consultee 3, despite having highlighted the absence of training, appears to have developed an understanding of the principles and the philosophy of consultation, and this is made clear by her comment that “It (consultation) has to have an impact. The responsibility for that lies on us both though.”

This principle of a shared process with shared responsibility for the outcomes is fundamental to consultation and is opposite in ideology to the type of referral process that this consultee had previously engaged in and shows that, even without training, this consultee has developed a good understanding of the basic principles. This consultee could be described as astute. She is the only consultee interviewed who recognised that training should have been offered in order to both explain the process that was being introduced and consequently to maximise the knowledge and understanding of all participants. She has developed a good grasp

of the fundamental principles of consultation without benefit of any formal training which suggests that, with training, she would have been an extremely skilful and knowledgeable participant in the process. The lack of training for consultees was a missed opportunity of some significance, and training for all participants, not just consultants, would therefore feature as a characteristic of an effective consultation system.

5.3 Interviews with Consultees – roles and partnership

The six SENCOs who were interviewed about their roles as consultees were, coincidentally, evenly divided in terms of their length of experience in the SENCO role; three of the six having been SENCOs for more than five years and three having less than five years' experience in the role. Of the three less-experienced SENCOs one was very new to the role, having just completed her first year as SENCO. Their length of tenure as SENCO does not appear to have had any significant bearing on their views of consultation and their role in the process. The interview responses indicated that four of the six viewed themselves as partners in the consultation process but at varying degrees, with only consultee 2 – who has already been seen to be positive about the process - describing her role confidently as “that of partner”. The other three describe their role as “I suppose I am a partner” (consultee 1); “forced partner” (consultee 3) and “I think I am a partner (consultee 6). These views on partnership are particularly interesting when linked to the observations, as consultee 6, who thinks she is a partner, worked in the ‘pro-consultation’ school and consultee 3, the ‘forced partner’, worked in the

'anti-consultation' school. The observations will be discussed in more detail in 5.16.

Consultee 5 did not make any explicit comments about the partnership element of their role, whereas consultee 4 was very clear in her view, stating that "I don't feel like a partner," although this view was contradicted somewhat by her statement that "We work as colleagues". It can be argued that colleagues are not necessarily, by definition, partners, but the notion of working as colleagues does suggest some feeling of collegiality and of working towards a common purpose, which perhaps gives an element of ambiguity to her responses. It would appear from the negative or missing responses in terms of partnership working from both consultees 4 and 5 that they have not viewed their consultants as colleagues who have had additional or complementary training, an approach recommended by Lacey and Lomas (1993). It is a possibility that their views have been influenced by their having had a negative experience with a consultant, although there is no clear evidence in the interviews to support this. It must also be considered that these consultees also engage in consultation with Educational Psychologists, and so there is also a possibility that a negative experience with a different professional has soured their response to consultation as a process.

It is interesting to note that when consultee 5 apports praise for any progress made by the pupil to the classteacher and disregards the consultant's input then she is not demonstrating professionalism or respect for others, the very attributes that she undoubtedly expects from her consultant. The quality of positive professional exchange, as described by Davies and Davies (1989) is lacking.

There is an apparent absence of a shared sense of involvement in the decisions as to the way forward for the pupil. However, that could again be explained by the fact that consultation in the context of this research does not operate as a voluntary relationship (Caplan, 1970; Conoley and Conoley, 1992) and so it is perhaps expecting too much of the consultees to expect them to be willing participants. Gutkin and Curtis (1982) stated that consultation cannot be a coerced process and yet, with hindsight, it could be argued that SENCOs were coerced into participating in the process. The support service offer was, essentially, an offer of support through consultation or nothing. These consultees may, therefore, have been merely employing the coping strategies of withdrawing, filtering and displacement as described by Bowers (1989).

With the exception of consultee 2, the views of consultees 1, 3 and 6 on the partnership role in the process of consultation as it is practised are not entirely convincing and would seem to reflect more what they have been told about their role in the process rather than what they genuinely feel or have experienced. This perspective is supported by the number of occasions that their responses to the interview questions were prefaced by phrases such as 'we were told', 'it was described' and 'we have the chance' which are indicative of a more passive or acquiescent role. It could be argued that, because they have been told that consultation is the most effective way of working, that they then assume this must be true but are still not entirely convinced. An analogy for this is when making an expensive purchase of an item that does not turn out to be of the high quality that we had expected, but because of the cost involved we do not really want to criticise it because it would feel as if we were criticising ourselves and our

judgement in making that purchase, so we do not criticise it but neither do we praise it because that would be disingenuous. Consultee 2 is alone in being the only consultee who does use any phrase such as 'I was told' but presents a position that seems to be more active than passive and that is positive about the consultation process.

5.4 Interviews with consultees – leadership

The SENCO role is designated as being a leadership role that should influence standards (TTA, 1998). The SENCO role has evolved further in recent years and it is now recommended that the SENCO should be a member of the school's leadership team. In addition, newly appointed SENCOs are now required to undertake a mandatory national accredited award. The TDA Learning Outcomes for SENCOs, as articulated in the mandatory SENCO National Award which was introduced in 2010, include: working strategically with senior colleagues and governors; strategic financial planning, budget management and use of resources in line with best value principles; deploying staff and managing resources; providing professional direction to the work of others and leadership and development of staff. These learning outcomes are all skills that would be expected to complement the consultation approach from the standpoint of partnership working. It seems somewhat incongruous, based on these descriptors, that SENCOs were expected to engage in a newly-introduced system, namely consultation, without the benefit of any training whatsoever, and this fact alone could possibly account for the reluctance of consultees 4 and 5 to give any positive comments about the process.

The SENCO role requires them to be involved in staff development in their schools and settings (Crowther, Dyson and Millward, 2001) and yet they were not themselves party to any formal level of staff development in relation to the introduction of a changed way of working. They would, therefore, have been at a serious level of disadvantage in terms of explaining to their own school-based staff the philosophy of the changed way of working with the SEN support services. They had not had any control over the introduction of this different way of working and would have naturally felt that they were being placed at a disadvantage, and this in turn could have led to feelings of vulnerability.

Consultees 4 and 5 were overtly critical of their role in the process and did not express any feelings of partnership working. It was seen in Chapter 4 that they had construct systems that involved communication, role clarity, territory and control. One was a SENCO of more than five years experience and one of less than five years experience, but their responses indicate a common bond in their reluctance to embrace the system of consultation. It can be seen from the literature that change in any form can bring resistance, anxiety and stress and that there is a need to let go of older and longer-held assumptions and beliefs before new ones can be taken on board. Jordan writes:

“...resistance is a very natural and almost inevitable outcome of being placed in a client role...It is an expression of underlying fears of loss of control and vulnerability” (1994:64).

This is borne out by some of the consultees' comments such as “The process is what the Advisory Teachers have decided it will be” (consultee 4) and “At the end

of the day it's the class teacher who's teaching the child so if they make progress then it's down to the quality of their teaching" (consultee 5) which could be described as negative, showing feelings of lack of control and defensiveness. In the system of consultation being practised in this research the pupil is the actual client although, as has been seen, the pupils do not necessarily participate actively in the process but are beneficiaries of it, as per the triadic and indirect relationship described in the literature (Conoley and Conoley, 1992; Heron and Harris, 1993). Yet it is likely, given the lack of formal training or detailed explanation of the philosophy of consultation, that the consultees viewed themselves as clients, rather than as equal participants in the process, and thus experienced some of the emotions described by Jordan (1994).

It could be argued then that consultees 4 and 5, by their reluctance to embrace this new system of consultation, were protecting their understanding of their role. It has already been seen, in the literature review, that successive government legislation from 2000 onwards added to the pressure and tension surrounding SENCO leadership, and it could be argued that the introduction of consultation in the context of this research, a changed way of working that was imposed without discussion or, ironically, consultation, did not show any acknowledgement of SENCOs as leaders but instead treated them as followers. At the same time it could also have added pressure to their role as the introduction of consultation would have required them to become more actively involved with their visiting support service staff member, their consultant. This would have been a significant added pressure for those SENCOs who worked in schools where SEN was not of high priority and where they were not on the senior leadership team. In these

schools SENCOs often do not have adequate or sufficient time to undertake the SENCO role in its entirety, as it is described by both the SEN Code of Practice (2001) and the TDA (2010).

This changed way of working would therefore have moved them away from the confines and rules of a referral system into a system that perhaps put greater pressure on their having clear and explicit knowledge of the needs of the children and young people in their schools and on their SEN Registers. Put bluntly, and perhaps unfairly, some SENCOs could no longer hide behind the paperwork of a referral system but had to be able to engage in the discussion, participation and shared responsibility of a consultation system. In this context it is easy to understand their reluctance to engage actively as the 'new' system would have added significant demands to their existing workload and they would have had no control or influence over how to effectively manage this increase.

When looking at the reluctance or resistance of the consultees to engage in consultation it can be seen that an understanding of the various models of change management was not brought into play. Lewin's model of Unfreeze-change-refreeze, for example, as described by Burnes (2004), was not implemented. In this model the unfreeze stage involves preparing the organisation (or participants) to accept that change is necessary by showing and/or explaining why it is not recommended to carry on with the existing status quo. The unfreeze stage needs to convey a compelling message, communicate a vision and also answer the question 'why'? The change stage happens when people begin to understand why change is necessary and start to believe and act in ways that will support the new

direction. It involves on-going communication that enables people to see how the change will benefit them and not just the organisation. Refreeze occurs when changes have taken place and have been adopted so that the changed state is internalised and/or institutionalised. This stage involves the identification of barriers to change and also the use of feedback, rewards and the celebration of success. Other models, such as Carnall's Coping Cycle (Carnall, 2007) with its' stages of denial, defence, discarding, adaptation and internalisation was not brought into play, nor was Johnson's (1998) analogy of the cheese.

Waddell and Sohal (1998) suggest that resistance may in fact be useful but that it is often mismanaged and that this exacerbates the difficulties associated with organisational change. They state that resistance tends to be linked with negative attitudes or with counter-productive behaviours and has come to be viewed as the enemy of change. Waddell and Sohal (1998) argue that resistance is a function of a number of factors, including rational, non-rational, political and management, all of which recognise that change is not inherently good and promote instead a need for a balance between change and stability. They state that resistance can be a warning sign by drawing attention to aspects of change that are wrong or not well thought-through, and cite politics as an example of where resistance to change encourages scrutiny and debate. Maurer (1996) states that those trying to implement change normally try to resist the resistance of others and resort to the use of a battery of information to try and convince others that they are right. Litterer (1973) stated that resistance brings its' own energy and that this energy can be used to encourage the search for alternative methods or outcomes.

The evidence suggests that models of change management were not considered when consultation was introduced, and that resistance observed in SENCO consultees was not given any credence other than to meet resistance with resistance in the manner described by Maurer (1996).

5.5 Interviews with consultees – technical support from consultants

It would appear from the interview responses of the consultees that they are all satisfied with the technical support they receive from their consultants, even if that satisfaction is sometimes expressed less than enthusiastically or even grudgingly. From the interview responses it can be seen that consultees 1, 3 and 4 present as the least enthusiastic. Consultee 1 stated “For the most part I am satisfied with the outcome” and “I haven’t been dissatisfied”, and this apparent lack of enthusiasm is mirrored by consultee 3, who stated “Usually I’m fairly satisfied.” Consultee 4, in similar vein, stated “I’ve never really been dissatisfied as such.” Consultees 2, 5 and 6 were more positive about the technical support they received from their consultants. Consultee 2, previously noted as possibly the most positive of the consultees overall, stated “I always feel that we have received good support and good advice” and consultee 5 was also unambiguously positive, stating “I value the support of the Advisory Teacher.” Consultee 6 was also definite in her view, stating “I think we get very good support.”

Consultee 2 was, yet again, very positive, stating “My Advisory Teacher gives excellent advice which always takes us in a different direction and opens up new avenues.” This comment suggests that consultee 2 views the process as a journey that encompasses change and challenge and that she finds this interesting and

exciting. It is not clear whether the 'us' she refers to is herself and the consultant or whether it is the school, but what is clear is that the next steps or the way forward is something that, in her experience, is embarked upon collaboratively, which is in accord with the basic philosophy of consultation process. If one of the goals of consultation is, as described by Jordan, (1994:preface) as "...supplying another person with the skills to work with children in new and different ways" then it could be said that this has definitely been achieved in the case of consultee 2.

Consultee 4, on the other hand, shows in a comment how the lack of formal training or detailed explanation of the philosophy of the process has meant that she has not understood the expectation that consultation will involve capacity building and the generalisation of skills as described by Conoley and Conoley (1992) and Watkins and Wagner (1995). The comment "Sometimes I feel I am being given very similar advice to what I've been given before for other pupils and I'm not as happy with that, but on the whole it works pretty well" shows that the absence of adequate training has hampered this consultee's understanding of the philosophy of the process. It could also be argued that this lack of understanding has held back her professional development as she is not generalising the skills and is therefore not utilising the process as effectively as she could.

Consultee 4's comment "Some pupils make good progress over time and are able to be moved back to School Action" shows that she is obviously aware that progress is being achieved. However, her statement "I know what I want from their involvement and I state that as clearly as I can" does suggest a lack of effective communication from both participants in the process. If the consultee was truly

articulating her expected outcomes clearly and in a well thought-out manner then it would be expected that she would realise, given her earlier comment about receiving similar advice, that the focus of the consultation she is requesting is similar to one raised previously. Similarly, if the consultant was communicating effectively, it would be expected that she would recognise the similarity in nature of the 'problem' being raised and would draw parallels for the consultee in order to promote generalisation and capacity building and to develop the preventative aspect of the process.

Consultee 5 is positive about the technical support received from the consultant, stating "We usually get good advice and practical strategies" and "However, we are given practical strategies to try and so that does have an impact on how the pupil learns and progresses." Some ambiguity has already previously been noted in her comment "At the end of the day it's the class teacher who's teaching the child so if they make progress then it's down to the quality of the teaching" and previously discussed in terms of the consultee not being prepared to accord any credit for pupil progress to the consultant but only allocating credit to the class teacher. However, in the light of the numerous positive comments about the technical support received it is possible that an alternative interpretation could also be attributed to this comment. She could be saying that, irrespective of the quality of advice or support offered by the consultant, it is the class teacher who has to implement the advice and suggestions, and if they do then the pupil will make progress but if they do not then the quality of the advice is immaterial as the pupil will still not make any progress. Either interpretation could be correct.

However, what is crucial, irrespective of the correct interpretation, is the consultee's own role in the process. A key aspect of a SENCOs role is monitoring (SEN Code of Practice, 2001), and if the consultee (SENCO) is monitoring effectively then she will be aware of whether and how the agreed actions from the consultation are being implemented and thus she will have a significant role to play in ensuring the progress of the pupil in question. This also clearly links to the responsibility Erchul (1992) ascribes to consultees, namely, that they should participate in good faith and if they agree to try a strategy then they should do so appropriately. According to Erchul consultants do not control consultees and so they cannot be held accountable for the success or failure of the consultation outcomes. However, due to the absence of any formal training that explained the pedagogy of the consultation process, this consultee cannot be expected to fully share this understanding of respective responsibilities and accountabilities.

Consultee 2 had a number of positive comments to make about the quality of support received from her Advisory Teacher consultant, most notably "I always feel that we have received good support and good advice. We get value added". Consultee 5 stated "I value the support of the Advisory Teacher" and consultee 6 stated "I think we get very good support". This particular comment is particularly interesting as it has been seen that consultee 5 had been very critical of the nature of partnership working (5.2).

None of the consultees expressed overt criticism about the quality of the support they had received, although for some it was expressed as 'faint praise' using terminology such as "I haven't been dissatisfied" (consultee 1); "Usually I'm fairly

satisfied” (consultant 3) and “I’ve never really been dissatisfied as such” (consultee 4). These bland comments could easily be attributed to a natural reticence on the part of some of the consultees to offer praise but could also be attributed to a genuine feeling that what they have experienced has only been satisfactory at best. However, closer examination of consultee 1’s interview responses show a consultee who is both involved in the process and comfortable with her role in the process. She talks about the process improving her understanding of pupils’ needs and of feeling listened to. Overall, consultee 1 definitely sounds as if she is a devotee of the process. Closer examination of the responses from consultees 3 and 4 suggest that they come from participants who are not as enamoured with the process as consultee 1 but who still admit that “It does work pretty well on the whole”, (consultee 3) and “It usually works quite well” (consultee 4).

It would appear that there exists an element of dissatisfaction from some of the consultees stemming from the introduction of the consultation process and their lack of clarity over their roles in this enforced process but, when speaking about the quality of the support delivered through consultation, they do not appear to have any complaints of any substance to make. Gutkin and Curtis (1982) asserted that consultation cannot be a coerced process. Both Conoley and Conoley(1992) and Heron and Harris (1993) include voluntariness as a characteristic of effective school consultation but this has not been an option in the consultation practised in this research and perhaps is an explanation as to why the consultees are somewhat hesitant or reluctant to show enthusiastic appreciation for the quality of the support they have received.

From the consultees' interview responses it is evident that the technical skills and knowledge of the consultant have a major influence on how they view the process of consultation. This is in agreement with the view expressed in "Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services" which stated that:

"The effectiveness of all support services depends crucially on the specialist expertise of the staff. Teachers and other professionals need to demonstrate high levels of credibility with their colleagues in the mainstream school." (HMI, 2005:11). All six consultees interviewed are satisfied with the technical support they receive from their consultants and are therefore, it would seem, inclined to place less emphasis on what they might perceive as the shortcomings of the process.

As the evidence suggests that an unequal partnership which, when combined with the absence of any formal training, creates an unequal power relationship, is foremost amongst those shortcomings then that abundantly illustrates and highlights the importance that the consultees have placed on technical skills and knowledge and reflects the notion of the content skills as described by Dyck and Dettmer (1989) as being a necessary element of effective consultation. It can then be seen that possession of a very broad knowledge and skill base on the part of the consultants is a characteristic of an effective system of consultation and is also key to achieving the necessary credibility as described by Davies and Davies (1989). This is also in accord with Ofsted's report of 2005, "Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services," which stated that:

"The quality of the staff and their commitment to inclusion were always crucial in delivering an effective service. Most services provided very high quality advice and

support based on extensive specialist knowledge otherwise unavailable to the mainstream school.” (Ofsted, 2005:2)

5.6 Interviews with consultees – the process and it’s evaluation

The actual process of the consultation experience featured as a construct with all six consultees interviewed, whether in terms of the process per se (consultee 1, 4, 5, 6); the initiation of the process (consultee 1, 3, 5); organisation of the process (consultee 2); preparation for the process (consultee 2); or process outcomes (consultee 3, 4). All six consultees expressed positive comments about some aspect or element of the process. In terms of the process per se, comments ranged from “I do feel comfortable about my role in the process” (consultee 1) to “We have the chance to say if we are happy with the support we’ve been receiving” (consultee 5).

Comments about the initiation of the process included “I am always asked, as part of the process, what I hope the consultation will achieve” and “The Advisory Teacher always wants to talk to me to get my perspective and discuss what we’ve already done in school” (consultee 1). The comments linked to the initiation of the process are clearly related to partnership and collaborative working. In terms of organisation of the process the comments included “I need to have a clear view of the range of needs within my school” and “The Advisory Teacher won’t start the consultation without parental permission” (consultee 2), again showing clear links to partnership and collaborative working that includes parents as partners in the process. Comments re preparation for the process included “It meant I had to work harder, had to know the pupil’s needs better” and “We agree outcomes and

write them on the Consultation Information Form” (consultee 2) are also indicative of partnership and collaborative working.

It is interesting to note that there is a movement in the comments re the process when those comments are associated with outcomes, with a number of the comments suggesting a less passive and a more challenging or assertive manner in some of the consultees. Consultee 3 stated “The outcomes I am looking for must be tangible in terms of results and pupil progress” and “I expect the Advisory Teacher to be giving us value-added support. She has got to tell me something I didn’t already know”. Consultee 4 commented, “Sometimes I feel I am being given very similar advice to what I’ve been given before for other pupils and I’m not happy with that, but on the whole it works pretty well”. There appears to be something of a shift away from the notion of partnership and collaborative working in these comments and a move towards the consultees viewing themselves as being on the receiving end of a process rather than being partners in that process. This is demonstrated by the use of words and phrases such as “I expect the Advisory Teacher to be giving us...She has got to tell me..” and “Sometimes I feel I am being given very similar advice...”. These comments suggest that when it comes to outcomes from the consultation process that these two particular consultees are expecting the Advisory Teacher to be engaging with them in the provisionary mode as described by Harland (2000) and the expert and directional relationship as described by Witt, Erchul, McKee, Pardue and Wickstrom (1991) and Erchul (1992). However, the consultees’ comments are not in accord with the view of Erchul (1992) that consultants do not control consultees and so cannot be held accountable for the success or failure of the consultation outcomes. It would

appear that, when considering the outcomes of the consultation process, that some of the consultees are moving away from partnership and back to expert-patient mode and would definitely want to hold the consultant Advisory Teacher solely accountable for the outcome of the consultation.

Carrying out an evaluation of the process itself is a key component of developing and refining effective consultation and, in turn, enables any problem areas to be addressed in order to improve future consultations (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989).

However, the interview responses from the consultees indicate that they do not share this view nor place such a high value on the process of evaluation. In fact, three of the consultees, consultees 1, 3 and 4, did not make any explicit comments about evaluating the process. Of the other three consultees, consultee 2 stated “We are supposed to sit down a term or two after the consultation has finished and review outcomes...but we don’t always manage to do that”. Consultee 5 stated “We have the chance to say if we are happy with the support we’ve been receiving” which would appear to refer more to the actual consultant involved rather than to the process, but is nevertheless an acknowledgement of evaluation and review.

Consultee 6 was the most specific, stating “The Advisory Teacher and I nearly always find time to sit down and review how the consultation has gone. I find this very helpful.” This is a very positive comment about this part of the process and yet the use of the phrase ‘nearly always’ shows that routine evaluation of the process does not take place as it is not integrated as a required element but is perhaps instead perceived as a useful and helpful optional extra.

In current educational practice where evaluation and review is the norm and not the exception, examples of which include the process of students' self and peer review of learning in school and of participants' review of training events, it is particularly surprising that evaluation of the consultation process itself has been under-developed and allowed to be viewed, at best, as an optional extra. It is difficult to ascribe responsibility for the absence of routine evaluation to the consultees as the research evidence has shown that as a group they have not had the benefit of formal training which would have explained the philosophy of the consultation process and the necessary elements of the process.

However, it could also be argued that as the consultees are a professional group who are deemed, as a group, to be worthy of leadership status within the school and who are expected to take a leading role in the training and development of staff within their schools and settings in relation to all aspects of special educational needs, that they should then be aware that all educational input in the school requires evaluation in order to be able to ascertain if said input supports pupil progress.

5.7 Interviews with consultees – professional development

The literature review showed that the goal of consultation, according to Jordan is: "...supplying another person with the skills to work with children in new and different ways" (Jordan, 1994:preface). Jordan also states that consultants should view themselves as change agents in schools and, as the fundamental objective of any training is to bring about or facilitate change, then it is possible to view

consultation as a process that supports the professional development of those who participate in it.

In terms of the connections between professional development and consultation elicited from the interviews with the consultees, Consultees 2 and 6 both made explicit comments, with consultee 2 stating that “It has had many benefits. I think it has developed my role as a SENCO” and consultee 6 stating “I feel part of the system and I think it has helped me to develop as a SENCO”. Other consultees alluded to professional development as a benefit of the process, including Consultee 1, who stated “I am asked to contribute my opinion and views and I am listened to”, and Consultee 4 who stated “We work as colleagues”. These comments are very much about partnership and collaborative working which could be taken to the next level of assisting their continuing professional development.

The views of consultees 2 and 6 in particular appear to be in agreement with the assertion of Watkins and Wagner (1995) that consultation will build ‘circles of support’ that are based on sharing expertise and responsibility. They are also in accordance with the views of Davies and Davies (1988) that staff in support services should, as part of collaborative working, be involved in enhancing and developing skills in others. The description by Conoley and Conoley (1992) of the generalisation of insights and skills learned in one consultation being utilised by the consultee to other clients (pupils) also seems to apply here and could be described as one of the characteristics of an effective consultation system. If, as these two consultees state, they have developed in their roles as SENCOs due to being involved in the process of consultation, then the goal of consultation of

facilitating 'difference', as described by Watkins and Wagner (1995) could be said to have been achieved.

Consultee 3 is very clear in her view of her own professional development in relation to consultation and it is a view that seems to support the notion that the control of the system of consultation rests firmly with the consultants. She states, "I never went to a training session that explained the philosophy or pedagogy of consultation as a process for the delivery of SEN support" and "It is their process not mine". This is contradicted somewhat by both consultee 5 who states "I was told it would mean that we would work together more closely than we would have done under the previous referral system" and by consultee 6 who states "We were told consultation was designed to support capacity building rather than dependency..." However, it could perhaps be the case that consultee 3 is stating her own opinion based on her own observations whereas consultees 5 and 6 are repeating what they were told about the process rather than what they have observed for themselves or personally experienced by their involvement in the process.

The views expressed by consultee 3 clearly show that by not receiving appropriate training and by feeling that the process of consultation has been imposed without any agreement or discussion then the development of consultation as an effective method of service delivery has been seriously hampered. It would appear that the absence of any training for the SENCO consultees has resulted in an unequal power relationship that has proved to be a barrier to the implementation of an effective system of consultation. These factors were described as barriers to the

development of an effective consultation programme by Conoley and Conoley (1992). Barriers to success as described by Dyck and Dettmer (1989) also included lack of training for roles and conflicts with existing educational values. It would seem to be apparent, from the views expressed by the consultees, that one characteristic of an effective consultation system for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teacher support to schools would involve both training and a clear understanding of roles.

5.8 Interviews with consultees – impact and outcomes

If a dictionary is consulted then it can be seen that impact can be defined as a 'strong effect' whereas outcomes can be defined as 'results'. Both terms are used extensively in education and sometimes appear to be confused or intertwined with each other in terms of their use and actual meaning. The views of consultees have included comments on both the impact and the outcomes of consultation and it will be interesting to look at these comments in more detail to try to gain a clearer understanding of what they were trying to convey. In terms of outcomes (or results) consultee 1 stated "For the most part I am satisfied with the outcome". Earlier in the interview she had stated that she is always asked what she wants to achieve from the consultation and "if... that is seen as too demanding or too difficult to achieve or unrealistic then the AT will discuss this with me in such a way that I am encouraged to re-think my original expectations". Consultee 2 stated that "We agree outcomes and write them down..." and also that "I think I am always satisfied with the outcome". Consultee 3 stated "The outcomes I am looking for

must be tangible in terms of results and pupil progress” and consultee 4 stated that “Some pupils make good progress over time...”

It would appear that there are a number of outcome variables expected or anticipated by the consultees. The outcome variables appear to include both quantitative and qualitative measures, quantitative indices including pupil progress records and movement along or within the graduated response as described by The SEN Code of Practice (2001), and qualitative indices including the expressed satisfaction of the consultee and the increased confidence of either SENCO or class teacher to meet the needs of the pupils who had been raised for consultation. However, none of the consultees explicitly articulated these outcome measures other than to speak quite generally of a review of the consultation itself which, according to consultee 2, does not take place very often, as she states “We are supposed to sit down a term or two after the consultation has finished and review outcomes...but we don’t always manage to do that”. This could be linked to the priority that this consultee sets to reviewing past consultations, rather than just looking to start the next one, whereas consultee 6 does appear to prioritise the review process, stating that “The Advisory Teacher and I nearly always find time to sit down and review how the consultation has gone. I find this very helpful”.

Evaluation of the process was viewed as an important factor by Dyck and Dettmer (1989) but it has already been noted that the systematic reviewing of the consultation process appears to be given little weight overall by the six consultees. All have stated that they give consideration to outcomes or, as consultee 1 words it, to “ ..what I hope the consultation will achieve”. However, only consultees 2, 3

and 6 referred to the review process, with only consultee 6 stating that the review actually does take place and that she finds it a helpful process. It does seem quite extraordinary that, in an education system that is outcome-driven, the school-based consultees do not appear to place a high value on reviewing the outcomes of the consultations they have engaged in.

If the goals of consultation are:

“.. to solve an immediate problem, to enhance the ability of the client to solve similar problems in the future and to effect change” (Jordan, 1994:106) then the absence of a systematic review process is likely to be acting as a barrier to the long-term effectiveness of the process as a whole. Jordan also states that: “Consultation involves giving one’s skills away to others, enabling them to succeed, and systematically reflecting back to them that they have achieved success” (Jordan, 1994:106).

This process of reflecting back is part of the process of reviewing and, if it does not take place, then it raises questions of whether the consultees actually feel that they have actively participated in the success (or lack of) of the process, and also whether the consultants actually does want to give their skills away to the consultees or whether they are subliminally promoting a dependency culture but doing so within a system of consultation rather than within a referral system. The picture is further muddled by consultee 3’s affirmative statement that “Consultation has a positive outcome on staff too, it boosts their skills and seems to motivate them too”.

The cyclical process of consultation as a form of action research, as derived from Lewin's (1952) field force theory, includes an evaluation cycle. The purpose of evaluation in action research is to lead to further questions and a possible repetition of the cycle. If the evaluation cycle is omitted then this dilutes the efficacy of the entire process including the collaborative nature of the process itself.

In terms of impact it is interesting to note that whilst it is referred to by all the consultants it is only directly referred to by three of the consultees, with only consultees 2 and 5 being able to give actual examples of the impact they had observed. Consultee 2 said, "The last consultation had a very positive impact, particularly on the pupil's self-esteem" and consultee 5 stated "...we are given practical strategies to try and so that does have an impact on how the pupil learns and progresses". Consultee 3, however, stated "It has to have an impact" but did not elaborate further, thus causing me to query whether this may be something she has been told will occur as part of the process of consultation rather than something that she has actually experienced.

"Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services" (2005) listed a number of activities delivered by support services that schools had cited as having the greatest impact. These included:

".. support to assess pupil's needs; observations and feedback to teachers and other support staff; the identification of appropriate resources and time for teachers to reflect on their teaching, share their concerns and plan more successfully for individual pupils." (HMI, 2005:12).

It was evident in this research that the consultants were far more aware of the importance of impact than the consultees were, making comments such as “The pupil’s attainment levels may accelerate or their behaviour may improve” (consultant 2); “We always have in mind the ‘so what’ question” (consultant 3) and “In the majority of schools it has had a major impact on pupil outcomes (consultant 4). What is less clear from the interviews with the consultees is why, if the consultants are all focused on impact, the consultees do not seem to be as aware of this focus. If the focus is truly on impact then this would appear to be somewhat contradictory, given that consultation is purportedly a joint process between two professionals working in partnership. It may be, yet again, that the absence of formal training for the consultees has had a negative effect on their practice.

5.9 Interviews with consultees – summary

The interview responses of the consultees show a range of both positive and negative comments about the system of consultation in its entirety. The positive comments tend to be clustered in the areas of impact and professional development and the negative comments tend to be clustered in the operational aspects of the process. The areas of roles and responsibilities and of partnership working attracted a fairly even split of both positive and negative comments.

It was interesting to note that all of the consultees had comments to make relating to how the system of consultation was introduced to their schools. They all had a clear recollection of some level of discussion or explanation by the consultants but only one consultee appeared to have realised that they had not had the opportunity to access any training that would have provided a more detailed

explanation of the philosophy or pedagogy of the system of engagement that was being introduced. This could be indicative that, as a group, they were passive and easily led. I have previously commented on this supposition in relation to a number of responses that appear to provide evidence to support such a finding and yet it has been seen that there is also ample evidence from their responses that show that they were also proactive and capable of challenging aspects of the system of support that had been introduced.

It does seem apparent from their responses though that any such challenges were made once the system had been introduced and had become established, rather than at its inception. However, what can be concluded from the consultees' responses is that, as a group, they were not given the opportunity to enter into the system of consultation from a position of knowledge and understanding at anything other than a superficial level. This has therefore meant that the system has been set up and established with an imbalance in terms of how much influence each participant has felt able to assert in the relationship and this imbalance has, in all likelihood, influenced the perception of ownership experienced by the respective participants. This will undoubtedly have affected the implementation of the system. I would therefore suggest that the evidence gathered during the interviews with the consultees shows that training for all participants, that is, both professional groups, is a characteristic of an effective consultation system.

There is evidence in the consultees' responses to show that consultation has had a positive impact on their professional development and this is supportive of the

philosophy of consultation in terms of its role in supporting skill development and capacity building. The generalisation of the skills and insights learned in one consultation being used by the consultee in their work with other pupils is referred to in the course of the interviews.

It was very clear from the interview responses that an area of great importance for all of the consultees is that of technical skill. All consultees expected their consultants to be bringing something additional to the table, and as long as that is happening then they appear to be prepared to overlook or, at least, to pay less attention to the areas of the system that they are less impressed or enthusiastic about.

All of the consultees interviewed were satisfied with the quality of the support that they received, even if some of them did express this satisfaction in a manner that appeared to be reluctant. From this evidence it can be ascertained that the possession of a high level of technical skills and knowledge (content skills) by consultants is highly regarded by consultees and is seen by them as a key characteristic of an effective consultation system. This is in accordance with the views expressed by Ofsted in the report "Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services" (2005).

The evidence also suggests that enhanced communication skills - particularly on the part of the consultant - and the associated ability to negotiate, influence and resolve any differences that may exist are also a key characteristic of an effective consultation system. The absence of systematic evaluation of the process by all consultants and consultees suggests that these key communication skills are not

as embedded in the participants as they need to be and that is why evaluation is not routinely taking place. It has been discussed in 5.6 that a proportion of the consultees view themselves as recipients of a process rather than partners in a process and so it could be argued that they would not therefore think that it would be their role to evaluate the process at its' conclusion or at some pre-determined point in the future. The previously discussed imbalance in the roles of consultees and consultants would, from the perspective of the consultees, have negated their role in any such evaluation unless the importance of their involvement in an evaluation process was promoted by the consultants.

It has already been seen that consultants 1 and 6 were the only consultants who referred to the requirement of an evaluation and that consultant 6 was the only one who claimed to carry this out with any regularity. If the consultants were not stressing the importance of the evaluation process then it is improbable that the consultees would have requested it, much less insisted on it.

The consultees as a group were always mindful of the number of sessions of Advisory Teacher support that they were allocated and their key focus was to maximise the Advisory Teacher input to their school as far as was reasonably possible. Their perception of maximising support involved accessing as much training and as many individual pupil consultations as possible. It did not include reviewing and evaluating consultations that had been completed. This view would be subliminally supported by their respective Head Teachers who often expressed the view that they did not receive as many sessions as they need from Advisory Teachers and so do not get as many children 'seen' as they would like. This

implies that Head Teachers do not actively support or promote a system of review. The exception is when the pupil in question is not making the expected progress and, when that happens, there would be a tendency to discuss the possibility of a statutory assessment request rather than a review of consultation work undertaken.

Consequently, SENCO consultees are not likely to request an evaluation of the process because it would use consultant's time that they would prefer to dedicate to consultation for a different pupil and, perhaps more compellingly, neither their Head Teacher nor their Advisory Teacher consultant, are promoting an evaluation or stressing its importance with any real conviction. The only exceptions noted were consultant 6 and, to a lesser extent, consultant 1.

The evidence shows that evaluations appear to be under-utilised and under-valued. This in turn raises the question 'why?' It has been seen from the literature and from the interviews with the consultants that a system of evaluation is important to the development and veracity of the consultation system and yet the consultants appear to have been willing to ignore this element in practice. This suggests that they either did not subscribe to the importance of evaluation or that they did not feel confident in their ability to persuade and influence consultees successfully. Either way, it is unsatisfactory and indicates that their communication skills are not as developed as may have been expected.

Ofsted's report "Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services" noted:

“Evaluation tended to focus on provision rather than outcomes” (2005:10), but this does not appear to have been the case in this research. The evaluations that were required to take place after consultation were focussed primarily on outcomes. However, as they were not carried out in any systematic or routine fashion then they did not provide the focus of either outcomes or provision.

To sum up, analysis of the evidence provided by the interviews with the consultees suggests that, in their opinion, the characteristics of an effective system of consultation are as follows:

- training for all participants in the process – this would lead to a greater sense of partnership working and a shared sense of involvement in the decisions made. The philosophy of the consultation process is that is a joint venture; something that involves ‘doing together’ rather than ‘being done to’. If only half of the participants have received training then it can never truly be a joint venture as half of the participants will always be at a disadvantage in terms of understanding the ideology that underpins the system.
- high quality professional exchange – this would involve professionalism and respect for the professional views of others and clearly links to the training received
- high quality technical skills and knowledge – consultants must possess a knowledge and skills base that is both broad and deep in order to be able to provide the ‘value added’ support to the schools they engage with
- parents’ involvement as part of the process – it has been seen that parental consent to the involvement of the consultant is a pre-requisite to the

process. This requirement in the context of the support service in this research is partly for legal and ethical reasons but is also recognition that the parent is the person who knows their child best

- a system of systematic review – even though this is not happening there appears to be a tacit understanding by the consultees that this should be part of the process
- it is supportive of professional development – this involves enhancing and developing skills in others as well as the generalisation of skills and insights
- it leads to improved outcomes for the client, ie the pupil – this will involve a review process and an evaluation as part of the action research cycle
- it has an impact (or strong effect) on the client, ie the pupil – this could be seen in terms of, for example, improved self-esteem or the implementation by the school of previously untried practical strategies that support learning

5.10 Interviews with consultants - partnerships

When looking at the views of the consultants in terms of partnership working a different picture emerges from that elicited from the consultees. Consultant 1's view of partnership working in terms of the consultation process is very unambiguous. She states "We are equals in the process" and "We are definitely partners, 100% so". It has already been seen in 5.3 that this is not a view that is endorsed unequivocally by any of the consultees and it would appear that it is not endorsed by any of the other consultants either. All the other consultants describe the working relationship with consultees as involving some sort of partnership but without the conviction of consultant 1. There is a similarity here with the views of

the consultees, who I have previously queried as to whether they were perhaps merely repeating comments that they were told by consultants when they started to engage in consultation. It is therefore also possible that perhaps the consultants are merely repeating phrases that they were told during their initial training.

Consultant 1 is also confident in her ability to build and nurture a partnership relationship with consultees, stating “I am successful in developing a good partnership relationship with SENCOS”. This crucial element of successful consultation is not explicitly referred to by any of the other consultants. Consultant 1 is the only consultant who expressly made a comment that showed an explicit awareness of the need to develop a relationship with the consultees she engages with and also the only consultant to make an overt comment concerning her own ability to develop such a relationship. Three of the consultants interviewed, (2, 3 and 6), comment on the fact that consultation as a process is respectful of the expertise of the teacher consultees they engage with. A significant skill of consulting is the ability of the consultant to show respect for the skills and experiences that the consultee brings to the consultation (Little, 1985) but these consultants have perhaps understood this only on a superficial level as they have not commented on the need to acknowledge this and utilise it as part of the process of developing good working relationships. It has been seen in the literature review that Davies and Davies (1989), amongst others, cited communication and interpersonal skills as essential skills to support collaborative working.

Consultant 2's views on partnership working are not as positive or certain about the equal status of the participants as consultant 1's views. She states "The consultee is a partner but more of a junior partner." This view is mirrored by consultant 5 who states "We are partners but not really 50-50 partners; more like 60-40 or even 70-30 in some schools," and by consultant 6 who states "Consultation is working in partnership but I would struggle to say it's a partnership in the true sense of the word." Consultant 2 also made a comment on the process which gives a further insight into her views on partnership, stating "I always recap and summarise the discussions as we are going along." This comment suggests it is made by someone who takes charge of the consultation meeting and recaps and summarises as she feels appropriate – much as the chair of a meeting would – and who therefore clearly views herself as the leader or dominant person in the meeting situation. This shows that her earlier description of the consultee as "a junior partner" is an accurate reflection of her personal perspective of the partnership element of the relationship.

The views of consultants 3 and 4 on partnership working show ambiguities and contradictions in their thinking. Consultant 3 states "It can be difficult to work as a true partnership sometimes but I always try." This could suggest her awareness, from her training and understanding of the process, that consultation is a process that is undertaken jointly by two participants, each of whom have particular skills, knowledge and perspectives to bring to the process (Conoley, Apter and Conoley, 1981). However, she also states ".. we involve consultees as much as possible," which is an incongruous statement to make when referring to a partnership arrangement. This statement suggests it is made by someone who is in control of

the process and who is undoubtedly the lead agent in that process because, judging from that comment, she believes that she can carry out the process without the involvement of the consultee if necessary. This suggests to me that this particular consultant understands the philosophy of the consultation process that she has been trained in and is expected to engage in but that she is quite pragmatic in her attitude to her professional practice. In other words, she is aware that she has a role to carry out and a service to deliver and if she can do that in partnership she will but if she cannot work in partnership then she will just get on with it herself.

Consultant 3 is an Advisory Teacher who has had significant experience of working in both a referral system and a consultation system and her comments suggest that a referral system is her default setting, the implication of that being that if she is not able to convince or encourage the consultee to engage fully in the consultation process then she will just revert to her default setting in order to carry out the work that is required and agreed but will “involve” the consultee as much as possible.

Similar ambiguities were also seen in the views of consultee 4. She stated “Consultation is about working in partnership to try and find a way forward” and also “I am the lead agent in the consultation process .. it is not really an equal process.” These comments are not as incongruous as those of consultee 3 but still convey an underlying view that the consultee is a participant who is required to engage in the process but on terms defined by the consultant. The comments of the consultants on the characteristic of partnerships reveal both an understanding

of and an agreement to the principle of working in partnership. However their comments, on the whole, appear to be contradictory as their practice, on the whole, suggests an absence of any real commitment to the principle of partnership working.

5.11 Interviews with consultants – the process

Consultant 1's perspective of the process both reflects and is in accord with her understanding of partnership working. She stated clearly "It is a joint process." Consultant 2 shared this perspective, stating "It is a shared process that recognises the expertise within the school." These were the only consultants who made explicit comments about the mutual nature of the consultation process, supporting the observation expressed in 5.10 that they were the only ones who operated from a perspective where an equal partnership was viewed as achievable or even desirable.

Consultant 6 made a comment about the consultees' understanding of the process and, consequently, their ability to engage meaningfully with the process that was, on the surface, rather surprising. She stated "I assume that the SENCOs who are the consultees already understand the process." A supplementary question clarified that, by this statement, she was saying that, as the consultees have been operating in this system for a number of years then, from her perspective, they should understand it. This apparently flippant and dismissive comment by consultant 6 was made more surprising by the fact that she is the consultant who supports and was observed in school 2, the 'pro-consultation' school. However, her seemingly indifferent attitude was somewhat redeemed by her later comment

that “I try and demonstrate the process more through practice than by just talking about it”.

Consultant 6’s comment could be viewed as either disinterested or patronising as the statement appears to show an unconcealed disregard for the basic principles of partnership working as it is not possible for someone to work collaboratively or in partnership if they do not understand the system or process they are expected to engage in. It is also a telling comment that demonstrates a subliminal feeling of territorial ownership of the process by the consultant that seems to be saying that the consultees can engage if they understand what consultation is about, and if they do not understand the process then that is unfortunate but it is not the consultant’s problem. This view does not take into account the absence of any formal training for the consultees, although barriers to success, as described in the literature by Dyck and Dettmer (1989), included lack of training for roles and conflicts with existing educational values.

It would seem to be apparent, from the views expressed by the consultees but not mirrored by the consultants, that one characteristic of an effective consultation system for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teacher support to schools would involve both training and a clear understanding of roles for all participants. It could be argued that consultant 6’s seemingly indifferent attitude was somewhat redeemed by her later comment that “I try and demonstrate the process more through practice than by just talking about it”.

Consultant 4 also takes a position of control when she states “I am the lead agent in the consultation process...” This is not a comment that conveys a real belief in the notion of consultation being a process that takes place amongst equals (Watkins and Wagner, 1995). However, it could also be argued that perhaps, from this consultant’s perspective, the consultees she engages with are either more passive, less confident or reluctant participants and so she does need to take a leading role in order for the process to get off the ground in any meaningful way. Although these are plausible and possible explanations they do not detract from the fact that, whatever the reason behind the comment, it would appear that this consultant has not focused sufficiently on the interactive forces of communication and interpersonal relationships identified as key factors in process consultation (Schein, 1969; Schmuck and Runkel, 1985).

The interviews with the consultants’ showed that there were a greater number of comments relating to two of the fundamental principles of process consultation, namely making a difference (Watkins and Wagner, 1995) and building capacity (Watkins and Wagner, 1995; Jordan, 1994). This could indicate that these principles were viewed as being of greater importance by the majority of consultants than the notion of mutuality.

Consultant 1 stated that “The process has definitely built capacity,” a view that was shared by consultant 4, who stated “It helps to build capacity and mainstream SEN,” and by consultant 5, who stated “It is a process that will build capacity.” It is interesting to note the perception of time that was expressed by these three consultants, with consultant 1 indicating that the building of capacity has already

happened, consultant 4 indicating it as something that is happening currently and consultant 5 indicating that it will happen sometime in the future. It could be argued that consultants 4 and 5 were repeating phrases heard during their initial and subsequent training, phrases that were used to explain and clarify the philosophy and ideology of the process, and that consultant 1 was the only consultant who was able to state with confidence and personal observation that this had actually happened and that the notion of capacity building had moved from the theoretical to the practical.

At the time of carrying out the interviews with the consultants the process of consultation had been in operation for over five years. Consultants 4 and 5 were themselves consultants who had been working within a system of consultation for a significant number of years and so it would be reasonable to expect that they would both be able to speak in the past tense, as consultant 1 had done, and to be able to say that the process 'has' built capacity. If this had not occurred, after such a number of years, then questions should be asked as to why this is the case. Is it due to shortcomings on the part of the process itself or on the part of the consultants?

In the course of the interviews some comments that could at best be described as woolly were made about the process itself. Consultant 4, for example, described consultation as "...the difference that makes a difference." This expression is one used by Wagner (2004) in her training materials but in the context of the research interview it was merely being regurgitated rather than being used in a manner that demonstrated an understanding of what this expression was intended to convey.

Consultants 1 and 4 both acknowledged that consultation is more than a one-off discussion or meeting, with consultant 4 stating “It is a process and not a one-off event.” Consultant 2 developed this theme, stating “The problem remains theirs (the consultees) because they cannot refer it on to anyone else in this process and so they need to be active players.” Consultant 5 spoke of its effectiveness, saying “Consultation is designed to build capacity in schools far more than a referral system ever could,” whilst consultant 6 described it as “.. a far more effective way of working,” later adding “Many schools now tell us that they would not want to return to a referral system.”

Consultant 5 had a similar view to consultants 1 and 4, stating “It’s a process that will build capacity”. However, this consultant also states “It is very difficult to be certain who or what has made the difference or the impact on pupil progress”. These comments could, on first reading, be seen as somewhat contradictory. The consultant is saying that the process builds capacity but then does not appear to be confident enough in the process - the “what” - to acknowledge that it is the implementation of the process that is instrumental in delivering the impact on pupil progress. However, it is also interesting to note the tense used by the consultant. She stated that “It’s a process that will build capacity” and not “It’s a process that has built capacity”, thus clearly suggesting that she is regurgitating a comment from her initial training rather than making a comment based on her personal experience.

This then naturally leads to her ambiguous comment about not being certain as to who or what to attribute the credit for any impact on pupil progress, or that she

views the wider benefits of the consultation process as having not yet been achieved; still a work in progress. This is even more interesting when it is noted that this consultant actively engages in the process with consultee 5, the consultee who attributed credit for any pupil progress made to the class teacher and did not give any recognition to the role of the consultant or to the process of consultation itself. It is impossible to say with any certainty whether the consultant's ambivalent view has influenced the consultee or vice-versa, but there is a definite link in their views as they are the only two participants who articulated a comment about to whom credit should be attributed when progress is achieved. Consultant 6 made reference to professional development commenting that "Consultation does support improved pupil outcomes" which, in turn, is indicating a view that the process of consultation is supporting professional development as measurable outcomes can be seen at the end of the process.

These comments bring into question how effectively this consultant is able to practise process consultation and maintain the focus on the interactive forces of communication, leadership and interpersonal relationships. It would appear that one of the process skills, namely that of dealing with resistance (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989), had been employed with some effect but not with total effect. This is evidenced by a consultee's acknowledgement that "we have the chance to say if we are happy with the service we've been receiving". This suggests that the consultant had been open and transparent about the service being offered and had ensured that the consultee was aware that they were given the opportunity to give feedback about the process. It re-enforces the description of that particular consultee's construct as being dispositional and suggests that the bringing about

of change by collaborative means can sometimes be misunderstood if it has not been signed-up to by both parties.

Consultant 3 states that consultation “.. is a partnership” but also acknowledges that “It can be difficult to work as a true partnership sometimes but I always try”. When we look in more detail later at the observations of the consultation meetings involving consultee 6 and consultant 6 in School 1, we can see numerous examples of partnership work in action. In three of the observations both consultee and consultant entered the room together whilst engaging in general conversation in a manner that suggested that they were very comfortable and at ease with each other. There was evidence here of the social skills of both parties and also perhaps of the credibility of the consultant, as it could be argued that the consultee would be unlikely to be relaxed at the start of the meeting if she felt that it was not going to be useful and productive for her in terms of the issues she was going to raise. This convivial manner could also suggest a voluntariness to the relationship, as described by Gutkin and Curtis (1982), but an alternative perspective could be that, as this was the only option available in terms of support service involvement, then the consultee is merely demonstrating a pragmatic nature and accepting a situation ‘as is’ in the knowledge that she is unable to alter it.

The notion of consultation being a process that supports capacity building in the broadest sense of increasing school-based skills and knowledge and thus reducing the reliance on external agencies is evident in the literature (Conoley and Conoley, 1982; Dyck and Dettmer, 1989; Watkins and Wagner, 1995.) Consultant 5 appeared to understand this key objective of the process when she described

consultation as “.. the antithesis of a referral system.” There was recognition by several of the consultants that the process requires consultants and consultees to defer to each other’s knowledge and skills (Little, 1985.) Consultant 5 stated that “It acknowledges the expertise that exists in schools” and consultant 6 had a similar view, stating “It recognises the skills of the teachers and builds on that expertise.” Consultant 3 went even further, stating “It is a more respectful process that recognises the expertise that already exists within a system” although this does seem to be somewhat at odds with this consultant’s earlier view that “we involve the consultees as much as possible.”

The consultants on the whole appear to have a clear and consistent view of their expectations of how the process operates in practice, and this is not dissimilar to the views expressed by the consultees. All six consultants interviewed acknowledged that the consultees are required to provide them with some background information as a starting point. Consultant 3 summed this up by stating “It saves time if we have some initial information that gives a brief pen-portrait of the pupil and the interventions the school have already tried.” Consultant 5 elaborated further, stating “We require information on the pupil in terms of their strengths and interests as well as their level of need or difficulty” which indicates that the consultants are looking to gather a picture of the whole child, rather than just focusing on the area of difficulty. Consultant 1 said “The SENCO has to state what has already been tried and its effectiveness” and consultant 2 stated that “The SENCO is required to provide background information which includes progress data.” The mechanism for gathering this initial information is via a proforma called a Consultation Information Form, and the use of this form was

referred to by both consultants and consultees and appears to be a part of the process that is understood clearly by both groups of participants.

5.12 Interviews with consultants – roles and responsibilities

There is much discussion in the literature regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of consultants and consultees as they engage in the process of consultation. What became apparent to me, following scrutiny of the consultants' interview responses, was that as a group they were much clearer about these roles and responsibilities than the consultees were. Overall, the evidence suggests to me that the consultees seemed to have a clearer understanding of the role and responsibilities of the consultants than they did of their own role and responsibilities in the process, whereas the consultants seem to have a good grasp of the roles and responsibilities of both participants.

Consultant 2 in particular had a very clear and unambiguous view of the roles of both participants. It has already been noted that this consultant recognised a key function of the process as being that the consultee remains the 'holder' of the problem with none of the 'passing it on' mentality that can happen in a referral system. Consultant 2 was also clear in her description of her role, stating "My role as consultant is to bring another layer of expertise in order to facilitate change." This notion of adding another layer is consistent with the views expressed in the literature by Little (1985), Jordan (1994) and Watkins and Wagner (1995) amongst others.

Consultant 6 also referred to this aspect of the role, stating “I add a different perspective and facilitate their being able to view things differently.” This comment clearly shows that this consultant understands that her role is to work with the consultee in a manner that supports professional development and also enables the opening up of possibilities and alternatives rather than just providing answers and solutions. (Little, 1985). It is consistent with the notion of the consultation process involving the giving away of expertise (Jordan, 1994).

The consultants as a group were also very aware of their accountability.

Consultant 3 stated “We are accountable and outcomes are paramount” which links very closely to Consultant 4’s statement that “We need evidence that what we are doing has made a difference.” Consultant 3 also stated “We always have in mind the ‘so what?’ question”, referring to the notion that all actions must make a difference and that, after their intervention, a school should be aware of the difference their input has made and not be able to dismiss their work with a ‘so the Advisory Teacher has been involved; so what?’ comment. It is interesting to explore the idea of accountability which is a strong and consistent thread in the consultants’ interview responses. It is important, for the purposes of this research, to clarify that the consultants are not held accountable in any literal sense; for example, their job security or prospects of promotion are not affected in any way by the outcomes of specific consultations.

The importance and emphasis that the consultants placed on accountability rather reflects the overall emphasis nationally on pupil progress and professional accountability (HMI; 2005). It is undoubtedly the case that accountability is a key

notion in education and one that applies to every teacher, be they class based or engaged in an advisory and external capacity. There is an expectation, articulated by Ofsted, that all pupils, including those with SEN, will make a minimum of two levels of progress, as measured by National Curriculum levels, per key stage. It therefore follows that all teachers, whatever their role, specialism or title, have a part to play in ensuring that pupil progress is achieved.

Teachers in schools are held accountable for pupil progress; previously via performance management arrangements and since September 2012 by a process of teacher appraisal, and also by a regularly changing Ofsted inspection framework. There is therefore no valid reason why 'visiting' teachers, that is, the Advisory Teacher consultants, should not be accountable for the role that they play in ensuring pupil progress. This appeared to be acknowledged by consultant 3 who stated "We expect the process to have an impact but it's difficult to be able to say with certainty how much progress is due to consultation and how much to other factors." This comment is in alignment with the content of "Inclusion: the impact of LEA support and outreach services" (HMI, 2005) which stated that Heads of support services should:

"..monitor the impact of their services during and after their involvement to ensure the pupils make good progress over time" (2005:4).

5.13 Interviews with consultants – Outcomes and Impact

It has already been seen in 5.8 that the consultees did not have a totally clear view of what they should reasonably expect this system of service delivery - consultation - to deliver in terms of outcomes and impact. The consultants as a

group appeared to have a clearer view and to place a greater emphasis and importance on outcomes and impact than the consultees. They made a number of comments to this effect.

Consultant 4 commented on how, by engaging in consultation, the process has supported the acquisition of skills by the consultees and their ability to generalise these skills to other situations, stating “Schools can now transfer strategies and interventions that have been suggested through consultation and apply them successfully to pupils with similar difficulties and needs.” It would therefore appear, from this comment, that the successful implementation of consultation utilises an instructional hierarchy of learning (Haring, Lovitt, Eaton and Hansen, 1978) which consequently supports the consultee’s ability to become fluent, accurate and confident in using a new skill. The learning hierarchy, as articulated by Haring, Lovitt, Eaton and Hansen (1978), starts with acquisition, moving through the stages of fluency, generalization and adaptation, until the learner is both accurate and fluent in using the new skill.

In those cases where consultation appears to have been less successful or less well-received by consultees it may be due to the fact that all the stages in the learning hierarchy have not been applied systematically. In the same way that Individual Education Plans are often unsuccessful because the pupil appears to have learnt a skill and so another skill is introduced before the pupil has reached fluency, let alone generalization or adaptation, so the consultation process may, at times, be less successful than would be expected because the later stages of the learning hierarchy have been either introduced too soon or have been neglected.

Consultant 4 also commented that consultation as a model of service delivery “Helps to build capacity and mainstream SEN”. This is extremely important as a broader outcome in exactly the same way that the shift in thinking from medical to social model of inclusion is important, because it is indicative of a fundamental change in thinking and thus in ethos and pedagogy. It supports the move away from dependency on outside agencies to a system whereby the consultant gives away their skills and knowledge and the consultee gains through a system that supports their professional development (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989, Jordan, 1994, Watkins and Wagner, 1995). A SENCO who understands the importance of SEN as a mainstream issue rather than seeing SEN as a bolt-on (Audit Commission, 2002) is far more likely to understand that their role as SENCO requires them to be the champion for SEN and inclusion in their school. They will also be more able to clearly articulate the vision for SEN and disability in their school or setting and be able to produce a policy and plan that will drive the school forward.

There are a number of models of inclusion in the literature and it can be argued that, in western cultures, a medical model has most influenced our thinking and practices towards disability and, by association, special educational needs. In the medical model disability is viewed as being caused by a physical or mental impairment and it is the impairment that becomes the focus of attention. The disabled child thus becomes defined by their medical condition and so becomes labelled as, for example, deaf, autistic or Down’s. In this model the disability is seen as a fault that requires treatment and the disability is seen before the child. The social model of inclusion sees the problem or difficulty that exists as not the result of the individual’s impairment but in terms of social and environmental

factors within the school, and also recognises that any child may experience difficulties in school. The social model also recognises the responsibility of teachers to provide the conditions that will enable all children to learn. In summary, the medical model views the child as faulty, in need of a diagnosis, and this model exists in a society that remains unchanged, whereas the social model values the child, acknowledges that strengths and needs are defined by the child as well as by others, and supports society to evolve (Mason, 1994; Rieser, 2000). Therefore if, as consultant 1 has stated, the implementation of a system of consultation has moved the thinking and practice in some schools away from the medical model and towards the social model then it could be said that consultation has had a very significant impact on professional development and, more importantly, on the ethos and ideology of these schools. This is no mean feat and its importance should not be underestimated.

Consultant 1's responses also showed her agreement with consultant 4, as she stated that "They (the consultees) transfer the skills and strategies." However, she also stated that "The outcomes sometimes get overlooked" and so in this respect she differs from Consultant 4 who had stated confidently that "In the majority of schools it has had a major impact on pupil outcomes." Consultant 2, who was very clear in her understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of consultants and consultees, commented on outcomes from a different perspective, stating "...sometimes their expectations are unrealistic." This view is linked to the understanding of roles and it has already been seen that there is a mis-match between the two groups of participants in terms of their understanding of their own

and each other's roles and that this mis-match can be directly attributed to the difference in the training received by the two professional groups.

The views of the consultants in terms of outcomes do not necessarily appear to be always in accord with those expressed by consultees. For example, consultant 1 stated that "The outcomes sometimes get overlooked"; consultant 3 stated that "We are accountable and outcomes are paramount" and consultant 4 stated that "Clarifying and agreeing outcomes is essential to the success of the process".

These views are very clearly recognising the importance of outcomes and yet the consultees' views appeared to be suggesting that they had to be vigilant in the process if they were to ensure that positive outcomes were achieved, although with the impression that they 'receive' the outcomes rather than participate in the achievement of them. This apparent disparity perhaps takes us back in a cyclical fashion to the importance of communication skills and also to the importance of training if roles are to be understood clearly by all parties.

The consultants have not, naturally enough perhaps, made any explicit comments about the quality of the support they deliver through consultation although there are a number of implicit comments from five of the consultants that could be attributed to the quality of their support. Consultant 1 stated that "They (the consultees) transfer the skills and strategies" which suggests a successful outcome and that the process is being generalized which is one of the benefits of consultation (Conoley and Conoley, 1982). Consultant 2 stated that "My role as consultant is to bring another layer of expertise in order to facilitate change" and "I am coming into the situation to try and facilitate difference". She also stated that

“The problem remains theirs because they cannot refer it on to anyone else in the process and so they need to be active players”. These three comments are specific, positive and demonstrate that this consultant clearly understands the process and the respective roles of the participants in terms of securing successful outcomes.

Consultant 3’s comment that “We are accountable and outcomes are paramount” is not a direct comment on the quality of support delivered but indirectly implies that quality support has to be provided by the consultant if positive outcomes are to be achieved. Consultant 4 stated, similarly to consultant 2, that “My role is to facilitate difference”. She also stated “We need evidence that what we are doing has made a difference” which, in common with consultant 3, is again indirectly implying that quality support has to be provided by the consultant if a difference is going to be made. She also stated that “In the majority of schools it has had a major impact on pupil outcomes” which, when read in conjunction with her previous comment suggests that she is confident that quality support is being delivered. Consultant 6 is clearly confident about the quality of the support that she is providing through consultation, stating “I add a different perspective and facilitate their being able to view things differently”. She also stated that “Many schools now tell us that they would not want to return to a referral system” which, again, can be viewed as an indirect but positive comment on the quality of the support being provided. It also suggests in terms of outcomes and impact that, whilst staff in schools may not fully understand the philosophy of consultation, they do recognise that it has made a difference and now prefer it to the previous

system of referral. This is significant as it is a very positive endorsement of the consultation system and the technical skills of the consultants.

5.14 Interviews with consultants – Evaluation and review

It has been seen in 5.6 and 5.8 that the consultees as a group did not seem to place any great store on reviewing the consultations they have engaged in, and this appears to be true of the consultants too, with only two consultants making explicit comments about reviewing the consultations that they had engaged in and appearing to be keen to set in motion a process of systematic review. Consultant 1 stated that “We are expected to meet with the SENCO and review outcomes over time but occasionally I get the impression that they think reviewing is a waste of time”. This is quite a passive comment, stating ‘we are expected to’ rather than ‘I expect/want/plan’ and does not suggest that the process of reviewing is a high priority for this particular consultant. The passivity continues with the phrase ‘I get the impression’ as again this suggests acceptance of the consultees’ lack of enthusiasm for the process of reviewing. Consultant 6, however, is more positive and pro-active, stating “We do review the effectiveness of the consultation at the end ... during a face-to-face meeting between the SENCO and the Advisory Teacher”. This review is apparently an open and forthright exchange of professional views as consultant 6 also states “If dissatisfaction is raised when we review the outcomes then we would discuss it and try and find a resolution or a way forward.”

These are the only explicit comments made by any of the consultants in respect of the evaluation of the process. Dyck and Dettmer (1989) viewed the evaluation of the process as a key factor of participants' ability to develop and refine the consultation per se. They stated that the benefits of a system of evaluation are that problem areas can be addressed through means such as staff development activities. Evaluation of the process is also included in the process steps and clearly described by Gutkin and Curtis (1990) and Friend and Cook (2000). The inclusion of a consistently implemented system of evaluation is supportive of the development of consultation as a process and could be described as one of the characteristics of an effective system of consultation. The fact that it is not consistently implemented means that the development of an effective consultation programme is being inhibited.

The absence of an effective system of evaluation is a barrier to effective consultation and appears to be a barrier that can be attributed to both participants in the process as neither professional group appear to believe, as a group, in the efficacy of evaluation. Consultants should possess the necessary process skills to know and understand how to deal with resistance on the part of consultees (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989; Conoley and Conoley, 1992) but it appears from their comments and responses that they are, on the whole, accepting of the consultees' reluctance to participate in evaluation, possibly because they also share that reluctance.

The Consultation Information Form (Appendix 4) that is referred to a number of times in the interview responses contains discrete sections for agreeing the

objectives of the consultation and for evaluating the outcomes of the consultation. The first of these two sections is headed 'Consultation Objectives' and the form states that this section should be completed during the initial consultation session with outside agency staff. It asks the question 'What do you want to achieve for this consultation in order to improve the Every Child Matters outcomes for this pupil?' This question is followed by three bullet points where the objectives are to be recorded. The final section of the form is headed 'Outcomes following collaborative action through consultation (max 2 terms)' and is intended to be completed jointly by both consultant and consultee at a point in time up to a maximum of two terms after the initial consultation meeting. It asks only one question, namely 'Have the consultation objectives been achieved?' and requests that one of the following statements is circled: 'Yes,' 'No,' 'Partially.' There is then a space for comments and for the signature of person who completed it and the date of completion.

These two sections of the Consultation Information Form show that evaluation of the consultation is both a required and expected element of the process. The fact that this element is so frequently omitted implies that the consultants either do not appreciate or agree with the importance of evaluating the outcomes, or that they are not as confident in their skills of negotiating, persuading and influencing as their interview responses would lead us to believe.

5.15 Interviews with consultants – summary

The interview responses of the consultants also show a range of both positive and negative comments about the system of consultation in its entirety. There is a

similarity to the consultees in that the positive comments tend to be clustered in the areas of impact and professional development. Their negative comments tend to be clustered in the operational aspects of the process, particularly in terms of partnership working. The areas of roles and responsibilities and of partnership working again attracted a fairly even split of both positive and negative comments.

Their views on partnership working show some marked differences. Consultant 1 has been seen to be the only one of the six consultants interviewed to hold the view that they operate on a basis of equal status, as she commented “We are definitely partners, 100% so”. Consultant 1 was also the only consultant who showed an overt understanding of the need to actively work at developing a partnership relationship with SENCO consultees. This self-awareness on the part of consultant 1 was not shared by any of her consultant colleagues. All the other consultants commented on partnership working but were of the view that it was not an equal partnership and clearly showed that they viewed themselves as the dominant partner or lead agent in the process.

The absence of any formal training for the consultees has been commented on previously and would appear to have influenced the consultants’ views of the nature of the partnership process. As a group the consultants have received formal training and on-going peer support. They have then initiated a process in which they were the ones charged with describing and explaining what this process was about to their co-participants, so it is very understandable that they have viewed themselves, consciously or otherwise, as the lead participant in the process because, in practice – at least initially – that is exactly what they were.

This again confirms that training for all participants in the process is a characteristic of an effective system of consultation.

When giving their views of the process itself the consultants as a group had a view that a fundamental purpose of delivering SEN support to schools via a consultation process was to support capacity building and the notion of making a difference as described by Watkins and Wagner (1995). The preponderance of statements referring to capacity building suggest that this is an outcome given far greater weight by the consultants than the notion of working in a collegiate partnership. Although this notion of capacity building was not explicitly referenced in the interview responses of the consultees it appears to have been discussed between consultees and consultants as several of the consultants stated that they had been told by consultees that they now preferred this system of consultation to the previous system of referral.

Despite having had the advantage and benefit of formal training it can be seen that some of the consultants' comments about the process per se were vague and suggested that they had not assimilated the ideology presented in the initial training but were rather regurgitating phrases heard during their initial training. There was a greater level of clarity around the notion that the process is exactly that, a course of action that has a number of elements and is more than a one-off event.

In operational terms, both consultants and consultees appear to share a reasonably consistent view of how the process operates. All six consultants spoke about the use of the Consultation Information Form as a means of gathering

background information about the needs of the pupil in question as well as ensuring that parental consent has been given. The consultants were all clear that they wanted the background information to focus on strengths as well as areas of difficulty in order for them to be able to gather an understanding of the whole child rather than just the areas where the pupil was seen to be presenting with deficit skills.

It has already been stated that the evidence gained from the interviews suggests that the consultees do not, as a group, have a clear view of their own role in the process of consultation but, somewhat ironically, have a better understanding of the role of the consultant. The evidence from the interviews with the consultants shows a different picture. They have a clear understanding of their own role and that of the consultee. Given that they have had the benefit of training this is not surprising. What is surprising is that, as a group, they do not appear to have engaged in any serious reflection in terms of this disparity when acknowledging the fact that some of the consultees do not appear to have an understanding of the philosophy underpinning the process. This aspect also brings into question the true extent of the communication skills employed by the consultants as there is an apparent lack of active listening, if not a lack in other areas of communication.

In terms of respective roles and responsibilities the consultants as a group appeared to be very aware that they were accountable for their part in securing pupil progress. Several of them spoke of the need for them, through their role, to “make a difference”, to show ‘value added’ and to be able to answer the ‘so what?’ question in terms of the impact of their involvement. It was apparent that this was

an area that had been the subject of discussion with them and that they had taken very much on board largely, it seemed, because they understood and witnessed at first hand the pressures their school-based consultee colleagues are under in terms of demonstrating pupil progress to external forces such as Ofsted. It could therefore be said that one of the characteristics of an effective consultation system is that it supports improved outcomes for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The consultants have, in accordance with the views expressed by the consultees, acknowledged the role that the implementation of the consultation process has on professional development. They are sharing and giving away their skills and expertise in the manner described by Dyck and Dettmer (19890), Jordan (1994) and Watkins and Wagner (1995) and, consequently, supporting the professional development of the SENCO consultees. However, the greatest influence on professional development is that described by consultant 1 where the carrying out of the system of consultation has significantly influenced the ethos and pedagogy of some schools she works in and shifted their thinking and practice from a medical model of inclusion to a social model. It can therefore be seen, from the evidence, that a characteristic of an effective system of consultation is that it positively influences the professional development of school-based colleagues. The consultants are also clear that their input and the quality of their technical skills and content knowledge supports better outcomes, both for the professional development of the consultees and for the progress of the pupils who make up the client group.

Evaluation of the process is acknowledged by the consultants but not routinely implemented by any of them. Consultant 6 is the consultant who comes closest to implementing a routine system of review, and consultant 1 does recognise that it is something that she should be engaging in. However, it can be deduced that the lack of a regular, scheduled evaluation is preventing the development of the consultation process. The process is standing still rather than evolving and there is an absence of genuine reflective practice which would contribute to the system growing and improving. This absence of systematic review also brings into question the true nature of the communication skills of the consultants, as they are demonstrating, by omission, a lack of confidence in their own ability to deal with resistance and to influence the views of others. The literature, together with the service requirements in the context of this particular support service, provides evidence that a routine evaluation process is a characteristic of an effective consultation system.

To sum up, analysis of the evidence provided by the interviews with the consultants suggests that, in their opinion, the characteristics of an effective system of consultation are as follows:

- highly developed communication skills – this would involve not only the ability to use communication skills to build a professional relationship but also to acknowledge and deal effectively with resistance
- high quality technical skills and knowledge – consultants must possess a knowledge and skills base that is both broad and deep in order to be able to provide the ‘value added’ support to the schools they engage with

- parents' involvement as part of the process – it has been seen that parental consent to the involvement of the consultant is a pre-requisite to the process. This requirement in the context of the support service involved is partly for legal and ethical reasons but is also recognition that the parent is the person who knows their child best
- a system of systematic evaluation and review – even though this is not happening in any routine way there appears to be an understanding by two of the consultants that this should be part of the overall process
- it is supportive of professional development – this involves consultants 'giving away' their expertise in order to enhance and develop skills in the consultees as well as supporting the generalisation of skills and insights. It is thus supportive of capacity building
- it leads to improved outcomes for the client, ie the pupil – this supports the notion of 'making a difference' and would, by necessity, require a review process and an evaluation as part of the action research cycle
- the existence of a partnership relationship – this will involve the ability to build and nurture such a relationship with the consultees
- a shared understanding by both participants of the process and the respective roles and responsibilities of both participants – this will involve showing respect for the skills and expertise of the consultee and the level of knowledge that they bring to the process
- it influences thinking and practice – this could be at the fundamental level of influencing both ethos and ideology

5.16 Observations of consultations in two schools

As has previously been stated in 4.3, two observations were carried out in each school in the Summer Term and a further two observations in each school in the Autumn Term. School 1 was perceived, by professionals who engaged with the school in the process of consultation, to be positive about consultation, and the four observations in that school involved consultee 6 and consultant 6. School 2 was perceived by visiting professionals to be anti-consultation or, at best, a reluctant participant in the process of consultation. The consultation observations in that school involved consultee 3 in all of the four observations, and consultants' 3 and 4 in two observations each, for reasons previously explained in 3.18. As previously stated, the Consultation Observation Proforma, detailed in 3.19, was utilised during the observations in order to provide consistency.

5.17 Positive features observed in School 1 - rapport

As would be expected from a school perceived by external agencies to be pro-consultation, there were a significant number of positive characteristics identified during the four observation sessions. The consultee involved in all four observations, consultee 6, had described herself in the interviews as "... a partner" and had stated that "I think we get very good support". She also expressed the view that consultation "...has helped me to develop as a SENCO". It was therefore anticipated that the observations would support identification of some specific characteristics of an effective consultation system.

It was immediately apparent from the outset of the observations that there was a good relationship, a rapport, between the two participants. In three of the four observations they arrived at the meeting together and were engaging in general conversation rather than just work-related topics. These conversations showed that their topics extended beyond mundane topics such as the weather to personal conversations as seen in observation 1 about the health of the consultee's child and her performance in a recent music examination. The voluntary sharing of personal information is indicative of a relationship that involves mutual trust and respect; a relationship that has been developed and nurtured.

5.18 Positive features observed in School 1 – communication skills

Throughout the observations in school 1 it was apparent that consultant 6 was employing communication skills in a manner that, as well as being effective, also conveyed professional respect and empathy. She routinely thanked the consultee for raising pupils for consultation and for providing the initial information that was required via the Consultation Information Form. These expressions of thanks always sounded genuine, not practised or rehearsed, and appeared to be received in that manner by the consultee. At the start of the first observation she thanked the consultee for raising a particular pupil for consultation and later, after reading through the information provided on the Consultation Information Form, she thanked her again. Further thanks were given at the end of the session when the consultee said that she would try to arrange time for the consultant to meet with the class teacher. In the second observation the consultant thanked the consultee

for offering to find out some additional information that the consultant has asked for, even though she does not want her to pursue this immediately.

In the third observation the consultant again starts with an expression of thanks, this time for returning a completed Consultation Information Form. She thanks the consultee again later for completing an Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence Chart, (ABC Chart), and again later once all the information has been shared but before they begin to discuss and agree outcomes from the consultation. The fourth observation also began with an expression of thanks by the consultant, and yet again it is for requesting consultation for a particular pupil and for completing and sending a Consultation Information Form. In all these instances the expressions of thanks were natural and came across as genuine and meaningful and not rehearsed.

The use of thanks seemed to have several positive benefits: it set a positive tone to the consultation meeting; it re-enforced an aspect of the consultee's role, that of information holder and provider; it implied a reliance on the consultee and her role in the process, and it was also a basic expression of courtesy. This particular consultant did present, by her communication skills and personable manner, as a professional who was respectful of her colleague in the consultation process and who was genuinely keen to work in a collaborative fashion.

Another interesting aspect of consultant 6's communication skills was her deliberate use of the word 'we'. This was used on a very regular basis and yet it did not sound forced or false. In one particular instance in observation 4 it was noted that the consultant used the word 'we' seven times in three sentences when

she was beginning to bring the session to its conclusion. In this particular instance it was used to reinforce the collaborative nature of the session by reviewing their joint working from the start (“we’ve been able to clarify the concerns”); to confirm their on-going joint working (“we’ve now agreed the outcomes that we’ll be working towards”); and to clarify what they are expecting from the process (“we’re both clear on what that progress will look like”). Her frequent use of the word ‘we’ conveyed the message that they were embarking on a joint process and were working in partnership.

From the evidence gathered during the observations it would be fair to say that consultant 6 made deliberate and purposeful use of the word ‘we’ as a tool to routinely reinforce the collaborative nature of the consultation process. However, another aspect of consultant 6’s highly developed communication skills was her ability to communicate the message of collaboration through limited language, getting her message across with fewer words and more subtlety. An example of this was observed in the first observation when the consultant had arranged to carry out an in-class observation and asked the consultee if it could be arranged for her to meet with the class teacher after the observation to discuss what she had observed. The consultee replied that this could prove difficult as there were a number of staff absences which were causing staffing difficulties but that she would do her best to arrange it. Rather than take the obvious tack of pointing out to the consultee that this meeting is an invaluable part of the information sharing part of the consultation process, and that it is important that relevant staff participate in the process wherever possible, the consultant merely thanked the consultee for her support. This brief statement, however, gave a very powerful

message that the key role of the consultant and consultee is to work in partnership and that the consultant was confident that this is what would continue to happen. It was very much a case of 'less is more'.

Another aspect of the consultant's communication skills that was very much in evidence during the observations was her use of active listening. During their meetings she gave appropriate eye contact when listening to the consultee and used non-verbal communication such as nodding to encourage the consultee to continue to share information. She also used verbal prompts such as 'ok', 'I see' and 'mmm' appropriately. She was very much tuned-in to what the consultee was saying and verbalised her empathy and understanding as appropriate. This was seen, for example, in observation 1 when the consultee was talking about the pressures of the SENCO role, and in observation 3 where she comments "I can see why you are concerned with her (pupil) progress, as it's obvious that you have been implementing a number of strategies to try and address her area of difficulty".

As part of her repertoire of enhanced communication skills consultant 6 also made regular and effective use of open questions. This was seen in the first observation when she asked questions such as "What do you think you would like us to achieve at the end of the consultation process? What is going to be a positive outcome for you in relation to this pupil?" and "What else will progress look like?" These questions were part of her solution-focused collection of open-ended questions and she used them effectively throughout all of the observations. Another good example was observed in the fourth observation when she said "...I was quite concerned that you haven't seen the expected progress with pupil Z.

What are your thoughts about why this might be the case?" Her experience and her effective use of questions was evident here as she was stating her position, ie, one of concern re limited progress. However she elected not to jump in and give her own hypothesis of the situation, preferring to seek the views of the consultee first. By taking this approach she was showing respect for the professional opinion of the consultee but also covertly checking whether the consultee had generalised any skills from previous consultations.

It was also noted that the consultant used questions to engage the consultee as a professional and to seek her permission or advice. In observation four, for example, the consultee told the consultant that the pupil's parents would like to meet with her. The consultant replied that she would be pleased to meet with the parents but would like to undertake some direct assessment work with the pupil in question first. She then asked the consultee if she thought that this would be alright. She could quite easily have replied that she would be pleased to meet with parents but not until she had carried out the direct assessment. By asking the consultee for permission to defer the meeting with parents she was giving a very powerful message, one that conveyed both professional respect and deference to the views of her colleague. In a very subtle way it reinforced the collaborative and partnership nature of the consultation process.

Another aspect of this consultant's use of language and communication skills that enhances the collaborative nature of the consultation process is her use of praise. Throughout all four observations she praised the consultee on numerous occasions. Sometimes the praise was solely for the consultee, sometimes it was

joint praise for what they had achieved together, and sometimes she did both at the same time, as in observation four when she said “I think we’ve done well today, but it was made so much easier because you had such good quality information about pupil Z’s difficulties.” The consultee always responded non-verbally to such praise, usually by smiling or nodding. It was seen to have a very positive effect on the professional relationship.

5.19 Positive features observed in School 1 – empathy

The ability to empathise, to understand and identify with somebody else’s feelings or difficulties is an important quality to possess, particularly when engaging professionally with colleagues in schools whose role could be described as challenging and pressurised. It is a skill that is not universally possessed by staff engaging in education support services as a whole or, more specifically, in the process of consultation. However, when such an understanding is present it can be a very powerful and potent element of the relationship building process that is part of the overall package that comprises an effective consultation process.

In observation 1 the consultee explained that she had not received her normal allocation of ‘SENCO time’ and consequently was running behind with some of her tasks, including the completion of a Consultation Information Form needed for the consultant. She was apologetic and the consultant’s simple expression of empathy – “I know how difficult it is when you have to do cover” – was clearly well-received by the consultee. The consultee had appeared quite tense when she was apologising for not having sent the form in advance of the consultation session but

she visibly relaxed, as seen particularly by her facial expression, following this expression of empathy and understanding by the consultant.

Towards the end of the consultation the consultee again referred to her workload, saying that she was “.. a bit snowed under at the moment..” and her ability to be open and honest about her current professional situation could be largely attributed to the fact that, due to the empathy she was experiencing from the consultant, she felt secure enough to speak frankly and honestly about her ability to engage fully in some elements of the process at that particular time. The consultant again showed a level of understanding saying, in effect, that it was “fine” to proceed at the pace requested by the consultee. As a result of this particular display of empathy on behalf of the consultant this professional relationship appeared to be comfortable, collaborative and, in terms of available capacity at this particular point in time, realistic. It also therefore gave the impression that this was a professional relationship that would grow and evolve, based on trust and professional respect. The consultant had not questioned or badgered the consultee about her difficulties in terms of current capacity to engage but had accepted the situation that had been openly described to her and had proceeded on that basis. This sent a powerful message of acceptance of the situation as described by a professional colleague and thus would be expected to foster greater trust and rapport.

Similarly, empathy was noted in observation 3, when the consultant had received the Consultation Information Form in advance of the meeting. One of her first comments, “I can see why you are concerned with her (pupil) progress, as it’s

obvious that you have been implementing a number of strategies to try and address her areas of difficulty” was both empathetic and re-assuring to the consultee. It was noted that the consultee appeared more at ease in the meeting after hearing this comment which acknowledged her concerns.

5.20 Positive features observed in School 1 – Solution focussed language and approaches

The observations suggest that solution focused language and approaches are a significant feature of the professional repertoire of consultant 6 and that they are used with good effect, particularly in terms of clarifying outcomes. The exemplifications from the four observations are numerous. For example, in observation 1, the consultant used solution-focused language to probe the expectations of the consultee in terms of pupil progress and outcomes in what I, as an observer, would describe as an unthreatening manner. Probing questions were asked, such as “How will we know, in terms of pupil progress, that we have achieved the consultation objectives?” and “What else will progress look like?” However, it was interesting to note that the consultee, although participating fully in the discussion, was in fact experiencing some threat or discomfort because, although she engaged verbally, she showed her discomfort by her non-verbal behaviours that included sighing and giving less eye contact. However, in terms of being specific and clarifying the outcomes of the consultation, the use of these probing questions and the solution-focused language that was employed was effective in terms of achieving the specified intent.

In observation 2 the consultant asked very similar questions, including “What will progress look like at the end of the consultation?” in order to clarify and agree the consultation outcomes. However, in terms of consultee responses, it was interesting to note that the consultee did not respond in the same way that she had in observation 1. She engaged verbally, as she had done in observation 1, but took it in her stride and did not exhibit any of the non-verbal signs of threat or discomfort that she had exhibited in the first observation. She had stated at the start of the observation that she was now catching up on her workload and feeling more ‘on top’ of things, so a reasonable hypothesis would be that as she was now feeling more in control of her SEN workload she was therefore feeling less stressed and so more able to engage in a probing and challenging discussion with greater confidence. Also, due to the fact that the consultant had not challenged her about being ‘behind’ with her routine SEN-related tasks but had heard what she had said, in the active listening sense, and had empathised with her, it could also be the case that the professional relationship had been strengthened.

Again, in observation 3, similar solution focused language was used in the questions asked, including “What would you like us to achieve at the end of the consultation process?” and “How will we know, in terms of concentration, that we have achieved the consultation objectives?” Whilst the consultee did at times seem to be finding it difficult to clarify what she was aiming for in terms of outcomes, she continued to engage with the consultant and did not display, through her non-verbal behaviours, any anxiety or discomfort with this element of the process. It was particularly noticeable in observation 3 that the consultant skilfully assisted the consultee’s engagement by maintaining a relaxed body

posture and even tone of voice throughout her probing. She did not exhibit any signs of impatience or irritation and this undoubtedly supported the process.

In observation 4 similar probing questions were again very much in evidence. However, in this observation the consultee was querying whether the pupil in question was dyslexic and so there was an added dimension to the consultation as the consultee wanted the pupil to be assessed for dyslexia whereas the consultant wanted, at this initial stage, to focus on needs rather than labels. The consultant showed a high degree of persistence in working towards consultation outcomes that focused on pupil progress rather than deciding whether the need should be described as dyslexia or not, and this did cause some irritation on the part of the consultee which was shown non-verbally.

5.21 Positive features observed in School 1 – Transference of skills

The consultee's ability to transfer skills from one situation to another has been noted as a positive feature of effective consultation (Dyck and Dettmer, 1989) and has been identified in this research as a characteristic of an effective system of consultation. This transference of skills on the part of the consultee was seen in the observations in school 1 on a number of occasions. For example, in observation 3 the consultee stated that she had completed an Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence Chart (ABC Chart) "...as we did for (another) pupil" and in observation 4 the consultee stated that she had carried out some of the initial assessments that the consultant had undertaken the previous year with a pupil with similar difficulties.

5.22 Summary of positive features observed in School 1

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in school 1 suggests that the positive features that support an effective system of consultation include the following:

- high level inter-personal skills that enable the development of trust and rapport, thus allowing consultation to be undertaken within a 'no-blame' culture that, in itself, promotes collaborative working that is supportive of open and honest discussion
- high level communication skills that involve not only the ability to use these skills to build a professional relationship but also the ability to acknowledge and deal effectively with resistance
- empathy on the part of the consultant for the challenges and competing priorities experienced by the SENCO consultee and the school
- the use of solution-focused language and approaches that help to maintain the focus of the discussion on what is possible and achievable, and that drills down to enable identification of specific and measurable outcomes
- the transference of skills that supports both capacity building within the school and the professional development of the consultee

5.23 Negative features observed in School 1 - dominant behaviours

As previously stated, school 1 is a school perceived by external agencies to be pro-consultation. The consultee involved in all four observations, consultee 6, had described herself in the interviews as "... a partner," stated that "I think we get very

good support,” and had expressed the view that consultation “...has helped me to develop as a SENCO”. Whilst it had therefore been anticipated that the observations would support identification of some specific characteristics that support an effective consultation system, it was also probable that the observations would provide some examples of behaviours or characteristics that would not be indicative of an effective consultation system.

There were a number of occasions during the observations when the consultant exhibited dominant behaviours that could be said to be contrary to the ideology of a collaborative process that had been articulated by a number of the consultants in the individual interviews. As has been described in 4.7, observation 4 started with the consultant very much in the mode of the senior partner and this was particularly evidenced by her use of language. My hypothesis for this, as noted in the Comments and Discussion in 4.7, was that, unlike the three previous observations, the consultant had already been engaged in direct work with another pupil. This meant that at the start of the observation she was updating the consultee on the work she had just undertaken, rather than just arriving at the school and so engaging in general conversation, as had been the case in the three previous observations. The conversation was therefore moving from the professional to the professional rather than from the social to the professional, and the consultant perhaps did not take enough time to mentally prepare herself, in terms of her use of language, for the change of task from giving feedback to starting a new consultation. She did revert quite quickly to her repertoire of thanking the consultee for returning a Consultation Information Form, but this

example does suggest that the consultant's skills in the language of collaborative working are not as honed as previous observations had suggested.

Another example of dominant behaviour was the 'read through' of the Consultation Form seen in observation 2 and recorded in 4.5. However, it should be noted that although I, as the observer, was aware that this scenario made me feel uncomfortable to watch as I perceived it to be indicative of dominant behaviour, I did not note any signs that the consultee shared my perceptions as she remained both relaxed and engaged.

The consultant was observed to summarise the meetings and this was seen most clearly in observation 3. Although the manner of doing this was respectful, it did suggest that it was the consultant's meeting as she was the one who took control and concluded it with her summary.

5.24 Negative features observed in School 1 – the use of language

It has been seen throughout the observations that consultant 6 presents, overall, as a skilled communicator. However there were occasions when her use of language did not enhance or promote an ethos of collaborative working. Her use of the word 'I' in observation 2, when she stated "... so that I can be really clear about your concerns .." was particularly noticeable as she had been noted for her frequent use of words such as 'we' and 'together'. As an observer it was noticeable that the use of 'I' in this instance caused a subtle shift in the balance of power in their relationship. This was not noted when the word 'I' was used, for

example, in observation 1 (“I know how difficult it is when you have to do cover”) as the intention and meaning was completely different.

Observation 4 provided some interesting examples of language usage. When the consultee raised her query about dyslexia in relation to pupil Z consultant 6’s response that she would not want to jump to a hasty conclusion and her later comment “I wouldn’t have initially thought of dyslexia..” could be construed as dominant and indicative that her views are paramount. Although the consultant did not dismiss the possibility of dyslexia, and indeed went on to gather further information, the consultee’s comment that she was ‘relieved’ that the consultant was going to undertake some direct assessment with the pupil suggested to me that she may have been expecting to have to convince the consultant to take her concerns seriously, rather than her expecting that her concerns would be listened to and acted upon unconditionally.

5.25 Negative features observed in School 1 – Solution focused language and approaches

In 5.20 it was noted that solution focused language and approaches are a significant feature of the professional repertoire of consultant 6. It was also noted that they are used with good effect, particularly in terms of clarifying outcomes. The observations provided numerous examples of probing questions such as “How will we know, in terms of pupil progress, that we have achieved the consultation objectives?” and “What else will progress look like?” being used with good effect in terms of successful clarification of consultation objectives and outcomes. However, it was also noted on a number of occasions that the

consultee, although participating fully in the consultation process, did appear to be experiencing some threat or discomfort which was shown in her non-verbal behaviours that included sighing, giving less eye contact and crossing her arms. This suggests that although the use of solution focused language and approaches is effective in clarifying what the consultee is hoping to achieve at the end of the consultation process this is not achieved without cost to the consultee in terms of her feeling vulnerable or under inspection.

However, it should also be noted that persistence is a useful tool in the consultant's toolkit and if she had not persisted in agreeing specific outcomes then this may well have not happened. It could perhaps be described, on the part of the consultee, as 'no pain no gain'. It is also worth noting again that consultee 6's responses to these probing questions varied; she exhibited discomfort in observation 1 when she was also feeling overwhelmed by pressures of work but did not show the same discomfort with the probing questions in the later observation when she herself had stated that she was feeling more 'on top' of things.

5.26 Summary of Negative features Observed in School 1

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in school 1 suggests that the negative features that inhibit the development and implementation of an effective system of consultation include the following:

- dominant behaviour on the part of the consultant that may reduce the role of the consultee to that of a supporting participant rather than an equal participant. Whilst it is obvious that the balance of participation will fluctuate

throughout a meeting with the 'lead' moving between the participants based on the phase of the discussion and the information being shared or explored at certain times, it is nonetheless noted that there were times when there was an unnecessary and unhelpful level of dominance that was discordant with the support service's professed ideology of collaboration and partnership working

- use of language that implies disparagement of the consultee's concerns and consequently does not promote an ethos of professional respect

I have elected not to include the use of solution focused language and approaches in the summary as a negative feature as I think the evidence elicited from the observations suggests that, whilst this was perhaps uncomfortable for the consultee at times, other factors were involved that reduced the consultee's ability to participate with comfort and resilience to the probing that is necessary if specific, measurable outcomes are to be agreed.

5.27 Positive Features Observed in School 2 – communication skills

Although school 2 is a school perceived by external agencies to be anti-consultation, there were nonetheless a significant number of positive characteristics identified during the four observation sessions. The consultee involved in all four observations, consultee 3, had described herself in the interviews as “.. a forced partner” but had also stated that “.. usually I am fairly satisfied.” It was therefore fair to hypothesise that, although this consultee was critical of some aspects of the process, she was also prepared to acknowledge positive aspects. Consequently it was anticipated that the observations involving

this consultee would support identification of some specific characteristics of an effective consultation system.

Consultant 3 was also observed to thank the consultee but, unlike consultant 6, she thanked the consultee for completing and returning the Consultation Information Form rather than for raising pupils for consultation. Consultant 3 practised active listening and there was evidence of this in observation 2 when she stated “That does sound like a very challenging situation for both you and for (pupil).” In observation 4 there was evidence of active listening and empathy from consultant 4 who commented that she understood the school’s concerns about a particular pupil and why they had raised that pupil for consultation. Overall consultants 3 and 4 made far less use of the word ‘we’ than consultant 6, although it was used with a flourish at the end of observation 4 when consultant 4 used it seven times in three sentences in the summary.

5.28 Positive Features Observed in School 2 – Solution Focused Language and Approaches

The observations suggest that solution focused language and approaches are as significant a feature of the professional repertoire of consultants 3 and 4 as they are for consultant 6. The observations provided examples of these approaches being used with good effect, particularly in terms of clarifying outcomes. For example, in observation 1 in school 2, the consultant used solution-focused language to probe the expectations of the consultee in terms of pupil progress and outcomes although I, as observer, noted that the language used felt more challenging than that observed being used in school 1. An example of this was

when the consultant was asking the consultee to think of how progress could be seen other than in terms of National Curriculum levels and she said “Think more immediately. What else will progress look like?” which was quite dominant and challenging. It was noted that the consultee, who had started the consultation meeting in an officious manner herself, then showed some discomfort when presented with these probing questions. However, in terms of being specific and clarifying the outcomes of the consultation, the use of probing questions and the solution-focused language that was employed was effective in terms of achieving the specified intent.

5.29 Positive Features Observed in School 2 – Calm demeanour on the part of the consultant

Observation 1 in school 2 was particularly interesting from the point of view of the behaviours observed. The consultant was persistent in her probing and questioning of the consultee, with the aim of clarifying and agreeing outcomes, and it was patently obvious to me as an observer that the consultee was not comfortable with this part of the process. This was clearly evident by the consultee’s facial expression, body language and verbal behaviours, including her use of the word ‘obviously’ and her angry comment when she stated “ ... I’m far more interested in what you’re going to do than with the semantics of objectives. Can we talk about the practicalities now?”

Throughout this consultation there was palpable tension in the room and yet the consultant herself did not display any tension in either her verbal or her non-verbal behaviours, nor did she act as if she was aware of the consultee’s tension and

annoyance. It was only at the end of the consultation when she was summing up that she acknowledged it, saying, I realise that you've found this part of the discussion a bit frustrating but it is important for us both to be absolutely clear about what we're trying to achieve." This was an interesting move on the part of the consultant, to show that she had noted the consultee's frustration at the end of the session rather than to have acknowledged it at the time. However, it was too late in the sense that the consultee did not want to engage any further at this point and the consultant's show of empathy was rejected. Whether the consultee's response would have been any more positive if her mood had been acknowledged earlier is unknown; the only certainty in this situation was that the consultant remained very calm in a very tense situation.

In observation 2 the consultant again demonstrated her ability to stay calm and composed. The consultee's comments about this consultation meeting clearly implied that she was only involving the Advisory Teacher consultant because she had been unable to arrange a consultation with her Educational Psychologist, and also that she wanted to pre-empt any parental complaints about accessing external support if the school decided to implement a fixed-term exclusion. These comments were made quite openly and without apparent awareness of how discourteous and unprofessional they sounded, and yet the consultant did not display any verbal or non-verbal signs of irritation or annoyance.

5.30 Summary of Positive Features Observed in School 2

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in school 2 suggests that the positive features that support an effective system of consultation include the following:

- high level communication skills including active listening that involve not only the ability to use these skills to build a professional relationship but also the ability to acknowledge and deal effectively with resistance
- linked to the above, an awareness of the importance of both verbal and non-verbal behaviours in order to project a calm demeanour at all times
- the use of solution-focused language and approaches that help to maintain the focus of the discussion on desirable and achievable outcomes, and that drills down to enable identification of specific and measurable outcomes

5.31 Negative Features Observed in School 2 – Dominant Behaviours

As previously stated, School 2 is a school perceived by external agencies to be a school that is 'anti-consultation'. The consultee involved in all four observations, consultee 3, had described herself in the interviews as “.. a forced partner.”

It was interesting to note that in school 2 there were a number of occasions during the observations when the consultee exhibited behaviours that could be described as dominant in nature. For example, in observation 1 the consultee took the lead at the start of the meeting but in a manner that could be described as dominant and not indicative of a collaborative partnership. Her statement “Let’s ... see how you can support us to address her learning needs” could be construed merely as a

business-like start to the meeting, but the tone of voice used suggested that it was implying challenge ie can you help us or can't you? Her comments in this meeting about 'semantics' and 'practicalities', previously discussed in 5.29, could be described as rude and were also indicative of domineering behaviour, if not dominant.

However, there were also instances of dominant behaviour by the consultants, particularly in their choice of language. In observation 1 the consultant asked the consultee "Is that an accurate statement?" when discussing the purpose of the consultation meeting, and this was not a question that could be said to be supportive of the development of a good working relationship. In the same meeting the consultant described the pupil's rate of progress as 'not a major cause for concern', effectively dismissing the consultee's concerns in what could be considered to be a rather high-handed way. Her questioning was also rather blunt at times and phrases such as "it's time to look more flexibly"; "think more immediately" and "we are not medics" could be described as comments made by someone who is acting as if they are in a dominant position.

5.32 Negative Behaviours Observed in School 2 – Bogus Engagement

There were a number of occasions during the observations when consultee 3 was observed in what I would term bogus engagement with the process. By this I mean that she was merely 'going through the motions', engaging in the process because it was politic to do so but perhaps without any real expectation or conviction that engagement in the process would, in itself, make a difference or lead to any improvement.

The clearest example of this bogus engagement was seen in observation 2 when the consultee effectively told the consultant that she was requesting Advisory Teacher consultation on a particular pupil because the Educational Psychologist did not have any more time available for pupil consultations that term and also because the school may need to consider exclusion and so wanted to be seen to have sought external support and advice. The consultee was transparent in her reasoning behind the request for consultation and did not appear concerned that her request for consultation was in fact disingenuous due to the fact that she did not actually want to work towards improved outcomes for the pupil. During the consultation she made a number of comments, including “we have done everything” and “he is taking up too much time” that implied that the school did not want to work with the consultant to find a way forward but just wanted to be able to report, if and when necessary, that they had engaged – however tenuously – in consultation. In this instance the process could, from the consultee’s perspective, be described as a means to an end rather than an opportunity to bring another perspective to a difficult situation.

5.33 Summary of Negative Behaviours Observed in School 2

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in school 2 suggests that the negative features that inhibit the development and implementation of an effective system of consultation include the following:

- dominant behaviour on the part of the consultee that attempts to reduce the role of the consultant to that of a colleague who provides only support, rather than the support and challenge that supports the ‘critical friend’

aspect of the role. Whilst it has previously been noted that is obvious that the balance of participation will fluctuate throughout a meeting with the 'lead' moving between the participants based on the phase of the discussion and the information being shared or explored at certain times, it is nonetheless noted that there were times when there was an unnecessary and unhelpful level of dominance that was discordant with the philosophy of collaboration and partnership working

- bogus engagement on the part of the consultee where consultation is employed as a 'tick box' exercise in order to be able to inform parents or others that outside agency involvement has been sought

5.34 Summary of Positive Behaviours Observed in Both Schools

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in both schools suggests that the positive features that support an effective system of consultation include the following:

- high level inter-personal skills that enable the development of trust and rapport, thus allowing consultation to be undertaken within a 'no-blame' culture that, in itself, promotes collaborative working that supports open and honest discussion
- high level communication skills that involve not only the ability to use these skills to build a professional relationship but also the ability to acknowledge and deal effectively with resistance
- empathy on the part of the consultant for the challenges and competing priorities experienced by the SENCO consultee and the school

- the use of solution-focused language and approaches that help to maintain the focus of the discussion on what is possible and achievable, and that drills down to enable identification of specific and measurable outcomes
- the transference of skills that supports both capacity building within the school and the professional development of the consultee
- an awareness of the importance of both verbal and non-verbal behaviours in order to project a calm, controlled demeanour at all times

5.35 Summary of Negative Behaviours Observed in Both Schools

In summary, analysis of the observations of the consultation meetings in both schools suggests that the negative features that inhibit the development and implementation of an effective system of consultation include the following:

- dominant behaviour on the part of either the consultant or the consultee that may reduce the role of the other to that of a supporting participant rather than an equal participant
- use of language that implies disparagement of the consultee's concerns and consequently does not promote an ethos of professional respect
- bogus engagement on the part of the consultee where consultation is employed as a 'tick box' exercise in order to be able to inform parents or others that outside agency involvement has been sought

5.36 Implications Of The Research

The evidence gathered throughout this research has shown that the positive elements of the system of process consultation being implemented outweigh the

negative elements. Overall it was noted that the participants – both Advisory Teacher consultants and SENCO consultees - were positive about the system that operated and it appeared to meet their respective needs. It has therefore been possible to identify a number of characteristics that could be said to describe an effective consultation process for the delivery of SEN Advisory Teacher support to schools as well, of course, as a number of characteristics that describe an ineffective process, and these have been summarised earlier in Chapter 5 (5.9; 5.15; 5.22; 5.26; 5.30; 5.33; 5.34; 5.35).

The characteristics that were identified and could be ascribed to an effective system of consultation were in excess of the characteristics identified that could be ascribed to an ineffective system of consultation. However, it was also noted that the system of consultation researched, a system already in operation and therefore researched 'as is', was a system that was initiated and led solely by the Advisory Teacher consultants without any authentic or real consultation prior to its introduction and implementation with the school-based participants whatsoever. When taking into account the manner in which this major change of service delivery by outside agencies was introduced – a change that was imposed without consultation with schools or the opportunity for school staff to access any training – it could be said that, in terms of on-going involvement, engagement and implementation, the system has been surprisingly successful. However, this has to be tempered by the recognition that some of the school-based participants engaged because they were very clear in their understanding that, in terms of a service offer, it was 'this or nothing'.

SENCOs were clear in their understanding that if they did not engage in this method of service delivery then they would be unsupported by two key outside agencies, ie SEN Advisory Teachers and Educational Psychologists who, as professional groups, had given a clear although subliminal message that the service offer was, effectively, 'consultation or nothing'. This was not, to put it mildly, the ideal basis for the introduction of a collaborative process where the ideology elicits the expectation that participants will work together as professionals of equal worth. However, the research evidence shows that, since its introduction, the system of consultation has been implemented with rigour and persistence by the Advisory Teacher consultants and that consequently the SENCOs have made the change from their previous role as referrers to their new role as consultees, albeit it with varying degrees of willingness and enthusiasm.

It has previously been noted that the context where the research was conducted was a local authority that had been identified by external audit as one in need of rapid improvement and that this was the key reason why changes in practice were identified and then introduced with speed. However, it is evident from the research findings that this rapid implementation, without benefit of consultation and, more importantly, formal training, was not in alignment with the ideology it purported to champion. This rapid introduction of a changed way of working, led by external professionals without discussion with school-based colleagues, was not conducive to the introduction of a system of consultation where both participants were supposed to be regarded as equal partners and who both, through training and development activities, understood the philosophy underpinning the system.

5.37 Implications for SEN Support Services

SEN support services whose method of service delivery is consultation need to acknowledge and remember that this is a method that views both participants as of equal value and merit; that both participants bring different skills and perspectives to the process, and that this in and of itself is a strength of the process. The evidence from this research suggests that the Advisory Teacher consultants, despite their comments to the contrary, view themselves as the principal participants in the process. When reflecting on the manner of introduction of the process then this could almost be seen to be inevitable. After all, they were the group that had received training and who were then required to go out into schools and introduce this 'new' way of working. They therefore started in a position of knowledge and dominance. They were the trainers for school-based colleagues and, by inference, the leaders.

The introduction of this changed method of service delivery was, essentially, that the Advisory Teacher consultants would describe it in a meeting with the SENCO consultees and that they would then model it through their practice. In effect, they then became the trainers for the SENCO consultees as they were required to adopt a modelling and coaching role in schools. At the same time they had the opportunity to hone their consulting skills via on-going support from their colleagues in the in-service triads. The research evidence also shows that this system of modelling and coaching, although far from ideal, was not implemented consistently, as evidenced by consultant 6's comment "I assume that the consultees already understand the process". It could be said that some of the

consultees were placed at a double disadvantage in that they did not receive formal training but neither did they receive a consistent experience of modelling and coaching from their 'attached' consultant.

The research evidence gathered has shown that a key characteristic of an effective system of consultation is the level of technical expertise of the consultants. Their skills are such that they are acknowledged by the consultees as bringing 'value added' skills to the process. The research evidence suggests that it is these high-level technical skills that have been so valued by the consultees that they have been prepared to persevere with a system that some of them did not fully understand or want to participate in. Over time the consultees have come to accept the system, their initial resistance naturally decreasing over time, and several of them have acknowledged that they now prefer this system and would not want to return to a system of referral. However, a key implication from the research is that systems of service delivery that depend on joint participation by both the central support services and the schools should, by their very nature, be subject to discussion and consultation by both parties and that joint training should be implemented prior to introducing such a radical change. This training would ensure that both parties had the opportunity to understand both the philosophy and ideology underpinning the new system and also to fully understand their respective roles and responsibilities. Access to training would have ensured that all participants took part in the process on an equal basis, understanding the ideology and their role in the process.

Additionally, this would have meant that they had an investment in the process, thus enabling it to become embedded rather than loosely planted and able to be uprooted and discarded easily. The on-going development activity of support through the triads that the support services engaged in would also have been a meaningful activity for school-based staff to participate in as well if they had so chosen, whether in triads with central support staff or with other SENCOs. The system was introduced in such a way that it promoted an imbalance of power and understanding between the two groups of participants and that imbalance is still evident several years later. This should be reflected upon in any future decisions regarding changed ways of working.

5.38 Implications For Schools and Educational Establishments

The research evidence shows that overall the SENCO consultees prefer the system of consultation to the previous system of referral. However, for some this was expressed as a grudging preference and one that had only been reached after a period of implementation during which time the Advisory Teacher consultants had delivered a high level of technical support that had supported improved pupil outcomes. In other words, they had been impressed by the technical support received and had therefore decided to put up with the process that enabled them to access this support. The evidence clearly shows that some of the consultees had been engaging in a system that they did not fully understand and in which they were unclear about the respective roles of the participants. Whilst the method of introduction could not be described as good practice it does bring into question why there was, overall, such passive acceptance on the part of

the schools. It has been seen that there was resistance and that some of the consultees were hostile to the system but, on the whole, the changed way of working was established without any real opposition. Part of the answer is likely to be contextual, relating both to the time of its introduction and the quality of the previous service delivery offer in the authority. It is unlikely that change could be introduced in such a manner in the current context of the increasing autonomy of schools, the diminishing power and influence of local authorities and the growth and availability of traded services. It would behove schools to question the rationale for change and to request information and training prior to any change – however appropriate and evidence-based – being introduced, but I think that this would be almost a given in the current educational climate where the balance of power has shifted significantly from the centre to the individual school. It has been seen that schools, despite their growing autonomy, still value external support that provides them with additional support to meet the special educational needs of their pupils but it would not be advisable or likely that this would occur now without information and training.

5.39 Conclusion

Reflecting back on this research project it is clear that the scope for further research in the area is vast. Only twelve teachers were involved – six SENCOs and six Advisory Teachers – and a study with a larger number would obviously give a more representative view. Similarly, an in-depth study of the implementation of consultation in more than two schools would prove informative. Whilst the research methodology employed has provided insights and illumination of high

quality data and a good amount of in-depth information, the qualitative rather than quantitative approach does have limitations in terms of the generalisations that may be produced. This has to be acknowledged as a limitation of the research and, with the promise of more budget cuts by local authorities over the next few years, the scope for research to investigate the effectiveness and efficacy of models of engagement is vast. Future research to investigate and identify the impact of consultation (outcomes) as well as to identify the processes that support the outcomes would add illumination to this area. Additionally, investigation into the contexts in which these are most effective would add additional knowledge in this area.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the research, with the obvious benefits of hindsight, if I was beginning the research now I would perhaps widen the scope of the research and carry out some comparative study in another authority. This would enable a broader investigation into how a similar system of consultation operates in practice and this would enable the gathering of some comparative data, which would promise another layer of illumination into the characteristics of effective and ineffective systems of consultation. However, it has to be re-stated that this research was an investigation into a system 'as is' and so this type of wider study would have influenced and altered the fundamental purpose of the research.

The research called attention to a number of interesting aspects that were not actively being sought. It highlighted the usefulness and the value of being able to sit in on meetings as an observer to study the similarities and differences in a variety of settings and contexts. The old saying that 'the watcher sees most of the

game' certainly applies to these types of observations and would be something that I would look to include as part of a programme of continuous service improvement. Teachers employed on Teachers Pay and Conditions of Service are subject to observation(s) as part of the performance management/appraisal process that has to be implemented. However, the performance management arrangements for teachers employed on Soulbury contracts are different and observation is not mandatory. The evidence gathered from this research suggests that this is an area that would benefit from being incorporated into the existing arrangements.

Completing the research project also causes me to question just how different this system of consultation is from the traditional system of referral. Both are started by the completion of a form, the key difference being that the Consultation Information Form is only issued if the pupil in question meets pre-determined thresholds for involvement whereas, in theory at least, a referral can often be requested on any pupil. Both parties, SENCO and Advisory Teacher, have key roles to play in both systems but would not necessarily meet and talk together as partners to the degree that occurs in the consultation system, at least in theory. The consultation process finishes with the compilation of 'agreed actions' whereas the referral system may end with a report that makes recommendations, but not necessarily with agreement from the school that they will implement these recommendations. The differences between the two systems may, on the surface, seem minimal but they are, in practice, quite significant.

The information gathered for this research project indicates that the system of consultation being implemented supports the delivery of improved outcomes for both the pupils who are the subject of the consultation and the SENCO consultees who, through their participation, are able to develop their professional practice. It has been possible to identify characteristics of an effective system of consultation as well as to identify characteristics of an ineffective system and consequently to proffer an answer the research question. Reflecting on the characteristics identified through this research it would seem that an effective system of consultation hinges on the dual characteristics of interpersonal skills and technical skills. The importance of interpersonal skills cannot be under-estimated but, without the addition of technical skills, they would not be sufficient to support effective consultation in the long-term. Good interpersonal skills only go so far; schools are now consumers of external support and the evidence gathered shows that they want to experience 'value-added' in terms of content skills. However, high quality technical skills are not as valued by consultees when delivered in isolation and not accompanied by high level interpersonal skills as this can be viewed as threatening or de-motivating. This parallels the twin track approach of support and challenge that underpins all support delivered to schools by external services, including school improvement advisers, where both elements need to be present to be most effective.

In conclusion, analysis of the evidence gathered during the research shows that the characteristics of an effective system of consultation are:

- the provision of training for all participants in the process
- highly developed communication skills that support professional exchange

- high quality technical skills and knowledge on the part of the consultants
- the involvement of parents
- systematic evaluation and review
- it is supportive of the professional development of the consultees
- it leads to improved outcomes for the client, ie the pupil and the school
- it has an impact (or strong effect) on the client, ie the pupil and the school
- the existence of a partnership relationship
- a shared understanding by both groups of participants of the process and their respective roles and responsibilities within that process
- it influences thinking and practice
- high level inter-personal skills
- empathy, particularly on the part of the consultant
- the use of solution-focused language and approaches
- the transference of skills that supports both capacity building within the school and the professional development of the consultee
- an awareness of both verbal and non-verbal behaviours

Analysis of the evidence gathered during the research shows that the characteristics of an ineffective system of consultation are:

- dominant or domineering behaviour on the part of either participant
- use of language that implies disparagement of the consultee's concerns
- bogus engagement on the part of the consultee

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Proforma for interviews with consultees

Interview with consultees
1. How was the process of consultation described or explained to you?
2. What did you have to do to initiate the process?
3. Did you have to provide any information prior to the start of the consultation and, if so, what?
4. How was parental permission gained?
5. Was pupil's permission gained? If not, why?
6. Were you able to state your expectations of the process?
7. Were outcomes clarified and agreed?
8. At the end of the consultation, were you satisfied with the process? If not, why?
9. Were you satisfied with the outcome (product) of the consultation? If not, why?
10. Was any dissatisfaction followed up? If so, how?
11. What impact has the consultation had on pupil outcomes? How do you know?
12. How would you describe your role in the consultation process? (eg partner, patient?)

Appendix 2 – Proforma for interviews with consultants

Interviews with consultants
1. How do you describe the consultation process to consultees to ensure their understanding?
2. How do consultees initiate the process?
3. Are there any requirements prior to the commencement of the consultation? eg. progress data, gathering of pupil's views
4. How do you gain parental permission?
5. Is the pupil's permission sought? If not, why not?
6. How do you clarify the consultee's expectations of the process?
7. Are outcomes clarified and agreed?
8. At the end of the consultation, is satisfaction with the process determined? If so, how?
9. Is satisfaction with the outcome (product) determined? If so, how?
10. Is dissatisfaction followed up? If so, how?
11. What impact has the consultation process had on pupil outcomes? How do you know?
12. How would you describe the consultee's role in the process? (e.g. partner, patient)

Appendix 3 – consultation observation proforma

Consultation Observation Proforma
1. Did one person appear to chair or lead the consultation or did it appear to be a joint venture?
2. Was there evidence of prior information being shared, such as the Consultation Information Form? How was this shown?
3. Did the consultee state his/her expectations of the consultation?
4. Did the consultant ask what the consultee's expectations of the consultation were?
5. Did the consultee provide a clear picture and description of the pupil's needs?
6. What evidence, if any, was brought to the meeting? e.g. attainment data, handwriting sample
7. Was there evidence of solution-focused approaches being used? If so, by whom?
8. Was there evidence of partnership or of expert/patient model? How was this shown?
9. Was there agreement on way forward/next steps/outcomes?
10. Was the meeting summarised at the end to confirm agreed actions? If so, by whom?

Appendix 4 – Consultation Information Form

Consultation Information Form (2 pages)

School:		Enquirer's Name:			
Designation:					
Pupil's Name:		Yr Grp:		COP:	
Parent/Carer:					
Address:					
		Tel No:			

Gender:		Ethnicity:		D.O.B.:		C.A.:	
Date Parent / Carer Consent for Service Involvement Obtained							
By whom							
Other Agencies Involved:							
Speech & Language Therapy		Behaviour Support					
Occupational Therapy		EMAG					
CAMHS		Social Services					
EWO		Other					

Pupil's views and wishes
Parent/ Carer views and wishes
Enquirer's Main Concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

Strategies tried already and their effectiveness:

Strategy/Approach	Period of Intervention	Effectiveness
Outcomes: What has already been learned about effective intervention and this pupils needs? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		

Pupil's Strengths/Interests	Areas for Development

Current Performance Levels and Targets
Early Learning Goals/ National Curriculum levels, inc. P levels
Personal targets

Issued by / Date:

Completed by / Date:

These sections to be completed **during** consultation with service staff:

<p>Consultation Objectives: What do you want to achieve from this consultation in order to improve the ECM outcomes for this pupil?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
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<p>Outcomes following collaborative action through consultation (max 2 terms)</p> <p>Have the consultation objectives been achieved? Please circle as appropriate:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Yes No Partially</p> <p>Comments :</p> <p>Completed by.....Date.....</p>
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XXX Service comprises Advisory Support Team and Educational Psychology Team. Parents are giving permission for service staff to access any information currently held within the service.

Appendix 5 – Example of discussion with a consultee prior to their involvement in the research

This discussion is included as an example to illustrate how informed consent was sought and gained from consultees. The face-to-face meeting with the consultee was arranged via a telephone conversation following agreement from the headteacher that it was acceptable for the school to participate. The 1:1 meeting took place in the consultee's school at the end of the school day. The venue and timing was the consultee's choice.

I began by thanking the SENCO for agreeing to meet with me and for giving up her time. I said that the headteacher had agreed that I could approach her regarding participation in my research project but that that was just the first stage of the process of seeking consent. I said that I had thanked the head but had stated that I need the SENCO to be in agreement as well; that the SENCO would have the 'final say' in terms of involvement. In other words, if the SENCO did not want to be involved then that would over-ride the head's consent. I asked the SENCO if she understood that she would make the final decision about her involvement and she said that she did and that she appreciated that consideration.

I then went on to explain why I was doing the research, what I was hoping to achieve by undertaking it, and why I needed the involvement of a number of SENCOs and Advisory Teachers. I described my plans for gathering data by the use of interviews and observations, and I explained how the information gathered would be written up and included in the thesis. I spoke about the importance of

confidentiality and anonymity, and I stated that there would be no surprises, explaining that interview questions and observation proformas would be shared in advance. I told her that transcripts would be sent to the relevant participants for approval and that information would only be included in the research if the participant was happy that it was an accurate record of what they had said. I explained that I would not be sharing any of the information gathered with the headteacher or with anyone else; it would be confidential to the research project.

I went on to state that, whilst hoping that she would be willing to participate, I understood that she may choose not to and if that was the case then I would not try and convince her to change her mind. I also stated that this would be voluntary participation on her part and that her participation, or otherwise, would not influence our future professional relationship. I also said that all participants would be sent an electronic copy of the completed thesis following examination.

The SENCO asked me how many SENCOs I needed to participate in the project. She also asked me about time-scales in terms of how long the interviews would take and when I wanted to carry them out. I told her when I was hoping to carry them out in broad time-scales but that I would be guided by her at all times as participation was not intended to add any burden to her existing work-load. I stated that she would be in control and that her participation, if she agreed, would be 'on her terms'.

I asked if she had any further questions but she did not. I asked if she understood what the nature of her involvement would be and that, if she agreed, that her involvement would be totally voluntary. She said that she understood. I asked her

if she was able to make a decision about her involvement now or whether she preferred to have some time to think about it before responding. She stated that she did not need any time, that she was happy to take part. I thanked her and we then agreed a date for the interview. Before leaving, I told her that I would email her a copy of the interview questions, stressing that this was for purposes of openness and transparency and that no preparation was needed on her part. I then checked that she had my contact details and told her to contact me at any time if she had any further questions or wanted to check anything. The meeting lasted about thirty five minutes.

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